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GRAPHIC SIGNS
OF AUTHORITY
IN LATE ANTIQUITY
AND THE EARLY
MIDDLE AGES,
300-900



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OXFORD STUDIES IN MEDIEVAL
EUROPEAN HISTORY

General Editors

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and

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Graphic Signs of
Authority in Late
Antiquity and the Early
Middle Ages, 300–900

ILDAR GARIPZANOV

OXFORD
UNIVERSITY PRESS

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UNIVERSITY PRESS

Great Clarendon Street, Oxford, OX2 6DP,
United Kingdom

Oxford University Press is a department of the University of Oxford.
It furthers the University's objective of excellence in research, scholarship,
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First Edition published in 2018

Impression: 1

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Published in the United States of America by Oxford University Press
198 Madison Avenue, New York, NY 10016, United States of America

British Library Cataloguing in Publication Data

Data available

Library of Congress Control Number: 2017957357

ISBN 978–0–19–881501–3

Printed and bound by
CPI Group (UK) Ltd, Croydon, CR0 4YY

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To Annika, Elvira, and Lenar

Acknowledgements

During my childhood, the first thing I saw waking up every day was a Central Asian carpet hanging on the wall beside my bed. It was replete with various geometric shapes and aniconic forms that were very distinct from the natural world and saturated with colours absent in my immediate surroundings. Every morning, my eyes browsed through this visual labyrinth and occasionally discovered new patterns and discerned silhouettes of unfamiliar things. This wall carpet with its interlacing lines and curves captivated my awakened imagination, and seemed infinite in the number of shapes and figures it revealed to my contemplative gaze. These early experiences of visual thinking no doubt contributed to my fascination with late antique and early medieval aniconic graphic devices, which constitute the main subject of this study.

The vast amount of surviving visual graphic evidence, most of which remains unknown outside highly specialized disciplines and some of which has not been studied at all, meant that it took much effort and external support to complete this book. The generous funding of the Research Council of Norway (grant no. 217925 for 2012–17) financially supported my research and writing throughout, whilst the highly supportive academic environment at the Department of Archaeology, Conservation, and History at the University of Oslo, which I joined in 2012, made my work on this project a highly productive process. My special thanks to my departmental fellow historians Klaus Nathaus and Veronique Pouillard for helping me to see my book project within a much broader perspective, and to Knut Ødegård and Alf Storrud for their genial assistance during my research trips to Rome and Istanbul. I also truly enjoyed the cordial atmosphere at the Norwegian Institute in Rome, my research base during various Italian trips, and I am grateful to Siri Sande, Anne Nicolaysen, and Manuela Michelloni for their unwavering support on those occasions.

Visiting fellowships at Balliol College, Oxford and at Clare Hall, Cambridge as well as a visiting membership at the Institute for Advanced Study in Princeton have greatly contributed to the successful completion of this book, by allowing me to write its various parts in vibrant and highly stimulating scholarly settings. I am filled with sincere gratitude to Lesley Abrams, Jonathan Shepard, Rosamond McKitterick, Anna Muthesius, Patrick Geary, Nicola di Cosmo, and Alan Stahl for their generous support and hospitality during those academic stays. I am also appreciative of companionship with other visiting historians and medievalists at the Institute for Advanced Study in the autumn of 2016; social interactions and conversations with most of them made my research stay there quite a unique experience. The latter membership provided me with access to visual resources at the Index of Christian Arts at Princeton University, and I am thankful to Catherine Fernandez for her expert guidance through its card database, which has yet to be fully digitized.

Writing a book navigating through the worlds of late antiquity, early Byzantium, and the early Middle Ages is a challenging task for a single author, and I have learnt many positive lessons from scholarly collaboration and the productive exchange of ideas within the Early Graphicacy network and during its conferences in Oslo, Rome, and Istanbul. I would like to express special thanks to Caroline Goodson, Henry Maguire, Patrick Geary, David Ganz, Larry Hurtado, Leslie Brubaker, Michelle Brown, Ben Tilghman, Michael Squire, Brigitte Bedos-Rezak, Beatrice Kitzinger, Richard Abdy, Jim Crow, and Chris Entwistle. I have also benefited from presenting preliminary thoughts and some sections of this book at the *Earlier Middle Ages* Seminar at the Institute of Historical Research in London, at the Oliver Smithies Lecture Series at Oxford University, the *Materialität und Medialität des Geschriebenen* Seminar at Heidelberg University, the Late Antique and Medieval Seminars at Cambridge University, the *Making a Mark* Conference at Brown University, and the Medieval Seminar at the Institute for Advanced Study at Princeton. I am further greatly indebted to John Arnold for his valuable feedback on the book's original design and to Henry Maguire, Michelle Brown, Celia Chazelle, Jinty Nelson, Rosamond McKitterick, Christoph Eger, Caroline Goodson, and anonymous readers at Oxford University Press for casting an expert eye on its earlier drafts or selected chapters and providing me with encouraging comments and constructive criticism.

This book relies on a substantial number of images to make its narrative accessible to readers, which necessitated the demanding task of acquiring relevant image permissions from different institutions in Europe and North America, and I am appreciative of the friendly efforts that Manuela Michelloni, Romy Wyche, and Alf Storrud invested in communicating on my behalf with relevant collections and authorities in Italy, France, and Turkey. I am also grateful to Svein Gullbekk and Alan Stahl for their cordial support and assistance in providing this book with the photos of relevant coins from their numismatic collections at the University of Oslo and Princeton University. Furthermore, I am beholden to those museums and libraries, such as the Metropolitan Museum of Arts in New York, the Walters Art Museum in Baltimore, and the Herzog August Bibliothek in Wolfenbüttel—to name just a few—that facilitate current visual and material turns in humanities by sharing images of their artefacts and manuscripts with researchers and the general public under unlimited Creative Commons licenses. I hope that more museums and libraries will choose this path of public service in the future.

Last but not least, I would like to thank Alice Hicklin and Albert Fenton for their assistance in styling my text in British English and checking its various technical aspects, as well as the editorial staff at Oxford University Press for their sterling work in bringing my manuscript to its final form.

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List of Abbreviations

<i>AB</i>	<i>Art Bulletin</i>
acc. no.	accession number
<i>AJA</i>	<i>American Journal of Archaeology</i>
ANF	Alexander Roberts et al., eds. <i>Ante-Nicene Fathers: The Writings of the Fathers Down to A.D. 325</i> , 10 vols (Peabody, 1994)
BAV	Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana
BL	British Library
BM	Bibliothèque municipale
BnF	Bibliothèque nationale de France
BrM	British Museum
BSB	Bayerische Staatsbibliothek
<i>BZ</i>	<i>Byzantinische Zeitschrift</i>
CBC	Alfred R. Bellinger, Philip Grierson, and Michael Hendy. <i>The Catalogue of the Byzantine Coins in the Dumbarton Oaks Collections and in the Whittemore Collection</i> , 5 vols (Washington, DC, 1966–2006)
CCSL	Corpus Christianorum, Series Latina
CCSM	Corpus Christianorum, Series Medievalis
ChLA	Robert Marichal and Albert Bruckner, eds. <i>Chartae Latinae Antiquiores</i> , 110 vols (Zurich, 1954–).
CLA	Elias Avery Lowe. <i>Codices Latini Antiquiores, A Palaeographical Guide to Latin Manuscripts prior to the Ninth Century</i> , 12 vols (Oxford, 1934–72)
DK	Ferdinand Lot et al., eds. <i>Diplomata Karolinorum: Recueil de reproductions en fac-similé des actes originaux des souverains carolingiens conservés dans les archives et bibliothèques de France</i> , 9 vols (Paris, 1936–49)
<i>DOP</i>	<i>Dumbarton Oaks Papers</i>
<i>Ecclesiastical Silver Plate</i>	<i>Ecclesiastical Silver Plate in Sixth-Century Byzantium</i> , ed. Susan A. Boyd and Marlia Mundell Mango (Washington, DC, 1992)
EDB	Epigraphic Database Bari. http://www.edb.uniba.it .
EDDB	Erzbischöfliche Diözesan- und Dombibliothek
<i>EHR</i>	<i>English Historical Review</i>
<i>EME</i>	<i>Early Medieval Europe</i>
<i>FS</i>	<i>Frühmittelalterliche Studien</i>
<i>Graphic Signs</i>	<i>Graphic Signs of Identity, Faith, and Power in Late Antiquity and the Early Middle Ages</i> , ed. Ildar Garipzanov et al. (Turnhout, 2017)
<i>Graphische Symbole</i>	<i>Graphische Symbole in mittelalterlichen Urkunden: Beiträge zur diplomatischen Semiotik</i> , ed. Peter Rück (Sigmaringen, 1996)
HAB	Herzog August Bibliothek
ICUR	<i>Inscriptiones Christianae urbis Romae septimo saeculo antiquiores, nova series</i> , ed. Angelo Silvagni et al.

<i>Intelligible Beauty</i>	<i>'Intelligible Beauty': Recent Research on Byzantine Jewellery</i> , ed. Chris Entwistle and Noël Adams (London, 2010)
inv. no.	inventory number
ICA	Index of Christian Art
JAC	<i>Jahrbuch für Antike und Christentum</i>
JLA	<i>Journal of Late Antiquity</i>
JRA	<i>Journal of Roman Archaeology</i>
JRS	<i>The Journal of Roman Studies</i>
JÖB	<i>Jahrbuch der Österreichisches Byzantinistik</i>
Katalog	Bernhard Bischoff. <i>Katalog der festländischen Handschriften des neunten Jahrhunderts (mit Ausnahme der wisigotischen)</i> , 3 vols (Wiesbaden, 1998–2014)
KM	Wilhelm Koehler and Florentine Mutherich. <i>Die karolingischen Miniaturen</i> , 8 vols (Berlin and Wiesbaden, 1930–2013).
MEC	Philip Grierson and Mark Blackburn. <i>Medieval European Coinage: With a Catalogue of the Coins in the Fitzwilliam Museum, Cambridge</i> , vol. 1, <i>The Early Middle Ages (5th–10th Centuries)</i> (Cambridge, 1986)
MGH	Monumenta Germaniae Historica
ML	Morgan Library
MMA	Metropolitan Museum of Art
NPNF I	Philip Schaff, ed. <i>Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers</i> , 1st Series, 14 vols (Peabody, 2012)
NPNF II	Philip Schaff and Henry Wace, eds. <i>Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers</i> , 2nd Series, 14 vols (Peabody, 2012)
ÖNB	Österreichische Nationalbibliothek
PL	<i>Patrologia Latina</i> , ed. Jacques-Paul Migne, 221 vols (Paris, 1844–64).
reg. no.	registration number
RIC	Robert Mattingly et al., eds. <i>The Roman Imperial Coinage</i> , 10 vols (London, 1923–94)
SB	Stiftsbibliothek
SBB	Staatsbibliothek zu Berlin
<i>Sign and Design</i>	<i>Sign and Design: Script as Image in Cross-Cultural Perspective (300–1600 CE)</i> , ed. Brigitte M. Bedos-Rezak and Jeffrey Hamburger (Washington, DC, 2016)
<i>Signum crucis</i>	Erich Dinkler. <i>Signum crucis: Aufsätze zum Neuen Testament und zur christlichen Archäologie</i> (Tübingen, 1967)
UB	Universitätsbibliothek
WAM	Walters Art Museum

Introduction

At the end of the fourth century, a Christian cleric in North Africa made a seemingly puzzling statement: ‘By that sign of the cross every Christian act is described (*describitur*): to do good in Christ and to hold fast resolutely to him, to hope for heaven, to avoid profaning the sacrament.’¹ This wording sounds paradoxical: how can a graphic sign (*signum*), made of two crossing lines and void of words or even letters, describe so many Christian beliefs, norms, and emotions? We could of course opt to discard this statement, deeming it to be the clumsy oxymoron of an unsophisticated Christian preacher. But the passage in question in fact came from the quill of one of the most eloquent and incisive Christian intellectuals in the first millennium AD, none less than Augustine of Hippo, who evidently believed strongly that the graphic sign of the cross could encapsulate a plethora of abstract ideas.

Augustine was not alone in his belief that graphic signs had a special meaning. Around the same time Quintus Aurelius Symmachus, a pagan Roman with a noble pedigree stretching back to the Republican era, commented on the meaning of the personal monogram he used on seals in a letter sent to an old friend. Symmachus wrote that, in the case of this type of late antique *signum*,² his ‘name was presented more to be understood (*intellegi*) than to be read (*legi*)’.³ Authored by a person with an entirely different religious and social background to Augustine, the passage expresses a conviction somewhat similar to the above dictum: viewing a graphic sign involves a form of communication involving mental comprehension that is nevertheless distinct from reading. More than a century and a half after Symmachus’ letter, an early Byzantine court attendant in Constantinople, Paul the Silentiary, appears to have been certain that graphic signs of this type were worth many words. In his poetic panegyric to Justinian I, Paul mentions an imperial monogram carved on the templon screen in Hagia Sophia, on which ‘the carver’s tool has incised one character (*γράμμα*) that means many words (*πολύμυθον*), for it combines the names of the Empress and Emperor’.⁴

¹ Augustine, *De doctrina Christiana*, II. 150, ed. and trans. Green, pp. 128–9: ‘Quo signo crucis omnis actio Christiana describitur: bene operari in Christo et ei perseveranter inhaerere, sperare caelestia, sacramenta non profanare.’ My translation for the first clause in this passage. On the date of this work, see Augustine, *De doctrina Christiana*, ed. and trans. Green, pp. ix–xxiii.

² On monograms defined as *signa* in this period, see Fink, ‘Neue Deutungsvorschläge’, p. 86.

³ ‘quo nomen meum magis intellegi quam legi promptum est’, Quintus Aurelius Symmachus, *Epistolae*, II. 12, *Symmachii opera*, ed. Seeck, p. 46.

⁴ ‘γράμμα χαράσσει / ἡ γλυφὶς ἐν πολύμυθον ἀολλύζει γὰρ ἀνάσσης / οὐνομα καὶ βασιλῆος’, Paulus Silentiarius, *Descriptio Sanctae Sophiae*, 713–15, ed. de Stefani, p. 49. The translation is slightly modified from that found in Mango, ed., *The Art of the Byzantine Empire*, p. 87.

Writing in the early fourth-century city of Trier in the northern part of the late Roman world, the Christian rhetorician Lactantius described another graphic sign, a divine monogram, which appeared to Emperor Constantine in a vision before the decisive battle of his career near Rome in 312. In his dream, the Roman emperor was told to have this graphic sign of God (*caeleste signum dei*) inscribed onto the shields of his soldiers, as a kind of divine armour. He did as advised and won the ensuing battle.⁵ An anonymous religious practitioner in fourth- or fifth-century Roman Egypt expressed a similar belief in the power of graphic signs while exhorting his readers in a practical manual—which modern scholars have called ‘magical’—to inscribe (γράφον) seven graphic characters (χαρακτῆρας) on a seven-leaved sprig. According to this author, a sprig inscribed with such graphic signs would become ‘the body’s greatest protective charm, by which all are made subject, and seas and rocks tremble, and daimons avoid the characters’ divine power (χαρακτῆρων τὴν θεϊαν ἐνέργειαν).⁶

These five authors, writing in different parts of the late antique world with diverse social and religious backgrounds, convey two aspects of their cultural universe that are essential to this book: first, that certain graphic *signa* were capable of encapsulating abstract ideas, referential information, or transcendent powers in a very efficient manner, and secondly, that despite being often described using terms associated with the act of writing, this form of communication was perceived as profoundly different from the latter. This visual form of social communication constitutes the subject of this book, which examines how graphic signs of the kind described above—such as the cross sign, christograms, monograms, and occult graphic characters—represented and communicated secular and divine authority, and how they were understood to relate to, and interact with, the supernatural world in the late antique Mediterranean and early medieval Europe, from approximately the fourth to ninth centuries AD.

There is, of course, nothing new about the use of abstract graphic signs as an aspect of social communication. As Genevieve von Petzinger points out, our early Palaeolithic predecessors were already inscribing them onto different surfaces, and early humans employed thirty-two specific geometrical signs at different sites in Europe, dated to the period between approximately 40,000 and 10,000 years ago.⁷ Yet because of the limited evidence regarding their usage, alongside the many other signs that were inscribed or drawn in subsequent centuries, the actual meanings of such elusive prehistoric signs remain arduously debated. In contrast, more precise knowledge of the specific material, historical, cultural, and religious contexts in which the graphic signs discussed in this book occurred affords us a much better understanding of their meanings—for the people who created and employed them in everyday and ritual settings—and of their wider societal functions. Most of these signs emerged in the first centuries of the first millennium AD, and their

⁵ Lactantius, *De mortibus persecutorum*, 44. 5–6, ed. Städele, pp. 200–2.

⁶ *Papyri Graecae Magicae*, I. 262–75, ed. Preisendenz and Henrichs, vol. 1, pp. 14–17; the English translation is slightly modified from that in *The Greek Magical Papyri in Translation*, ed. Betz, p. 10.

⁷ von Petzinger, *The First Signs*.

growing popularity in late antiquity and their modified usage in the early Middle Ages reflected changing socio-political, religious, and cultural views, perceptions, and assumptions. Such perceptions must have been shared by much of the populace, but also specifically by members of distinct social groups, in the years that witnessed the profound transformation of the Graeco-Roman world and the formation of medieval Europe. The history of such graphic signs is therefore capable of providing both a valuable historical insight into that process of transformation, as well as a more fundamental understanding of their operating mode across different cultures and eras.

0.1. GRAPHIC SIGNS, GRAPHIC VISUALIZATION, AND EARLY GRAPHICACY

The aforementioned aspects of late antique visual culture—namely the communicative potential of graphic signs and their difference from writing systems in terms of their mode of operation—fit remarkably well with the new theoretical model of visual communication promoted by modern research in the fields of visual studies (visual literacy), information visualization, and graphicacy, which have been gaining in academic popularity from around the turn of the twenty-first century.

The interdisciplinary field of visual studies originated in the 1950–60s and reached maturity in the 1990s, marked by collaboration between art historians, specialists in visual culture, and cognitive psychologists, with particular focus on the connection between mechanisms of visual perception and visual art, and on the role of visual images in social communication.⁸ On the one hand, such studies have emphasized that ‘visuality’ (to employ their argot) should not be dichotomized with literacy. As Tom Mitchell has stressed, ‘all the so-called visual media are *mixed* or hybrid formations, combining sound and sight, text and image’.⁹ To make this point clearer, he has introduced the notion of ‘imagetext’.¹⁰ Mitchell’s observations about the hybrid nature of visual media are especially relevant to the graphic signs discussed in this book, which operated as intermediaries between the Word and Image, and conveyed abstract information and concepts.

On the other hand, such studies have pointed out that the process of seeing is profoundly different from reading. In other words, ‘visuality’ depends on a specific set of abilities and experiences, and it may increase in significance in certain historical and social contexts—a phenomenon referred to as a ‘pictorial turn’.¹¹ Having started with the German School of Gestalt psychology, ever-growing academic research into the cognitive mechanisms involved in the process of seeing has shown the unique nature of visual perception, dubbed by the famous American art

⁸ See e.g. Arnheim, *Art and Visual Perception*; Mitchell, *Picture Theory*; Messaris, *Visual Literacy*; Elkins, *Visual Studies*; Elkins, ed., *Visual Literacy*. This list is by no means comprehensive.

⁹ Mitchell, ‘Visual Literacy’, p. 15.

¹⁰ Mitchell, *Picture Theory*, pp. 95 and 160–1. Mitchell’s term is different to the more restrictive term ‘iconotext’ as understood by Nerlich, ‘Qu’est-ce qu’un iconotexte?’, pp. 255–302.

¹¹ Mitchell, *Picture Theory*, p. 13; Mitchell, ‘Visual Literacy’, pp. 15–16.

theorist Rudolf Arnheim (1904–2007) as ‘visual thinking’. In the monograph that appeared under this title in 1969, Arnheim challenged the traditional juxtaposition of visual perception—as connected to concrete information and thought—with imageless rational reasoning, and asserted that ‘[i]n the perception of shape lie the beginnings of concept formation.’¹² Various studies in cognitive psychology in the past fifty years have largely confirmed his theoretical insights. Summarizing empirical research in the field, Liza K. Libby and Richard P. Elbach stated in 2013 that existing evidence has shown ‘that imagery can function to represent abstract ideas, in addition to functioning to represent concrete information,’ and that ‘perhaps “imageless thought” is not imageless after all, but rather involves nonconscious imagery.’¹³ These recent findings have thus confirmed an intuitive insight of the great physicist Albert Einstein (1879–1955), who said that ‘[t]he words of the language, as they are written or spoken, do not seem to play any role in my mechanism of thought. The psychical entities which seem to serve as elements in thought are certain signs and more or less clear images which can be “voluntarily” reproduced and combined.’¹⁴

Modern studies directed towards graphic designers have further corroborated the validity of Arnheim’s and Einstein’s statements, with reference to signs, graphs, and other abstract graphic forms employed in the field of information visualization—meaning ‘a graphical representation of some data or concepts’.¹⁵ Drawing on recent research in cognitive psychology, one of the leading authors in the field, Colin Ware, states that the process of visual thinking involved in graphic visualization is to a large extent determined by our visual ‘hardware’, and by the way the human brain processes and transforms visual stimuli. Hence, the basic principles of graphic visualization are of a sensory, and therefore universal, nature, occurring across different human cultures. Some of these principles are vitally important to achieve a proper understanding of the ways in which graphic signs were employed and organized in late antiquity and the early Middle Ages, and are consequently listed here briefly.

The first relevant principle is that an important target object or data should be represented by graphic elements that are visually distinct from less significant surroundings. This can be achieved by a difference either in shape or in size, both of which produce a pop-up effect that allows our vision to find an important object easily in order to process related graphic information at a glance. The pop-up effect is significant in information visualization, as research into visual cognition has shown that the capacity of our visual working memory is limited to a small number of simple visual objects and patterns: without activating that perceptual effect important graphic information can be easily overlooked.¹⁶ This sensory principle was

¹² Arnheim, *Visual Thinking*, p. 27.

¹³ ‘The Role of Visual Imagery’, p. 161.

¹⁴ Einstein’s letter to Jacques Hadamard, June 17, 1944, in Hadamard, *An Essay*, p. 142, with a slight correction in Calaprice, ed., *The Ultimate Quotable Einstein*, which can be corroborated by an earlier draft of the text in the Einstein Archive Online, no. 1-146.

¹⁵ Ware, *Visual Thinking*, p. 20.

¹⁶ Ware, *Information Visualization*, pp. 14, 140, and 394; and Ware, *Visual Thinking*, pp. 24–32.

repeatedly employed by the producers of the graphic signs under discussion in this book, and appears across various late antique and early medieval material media—for example, when christograms and the sign of the cross were carved on early Christian epitaphs in late Roman catacombs, when occult characters were inscribed on ‘magical’ papyri or metal and stone amulets, or when complicated monograms were drawn in late antique and early medieval manuscripts. Such intentional treatment of these graphic signs reflected both their significance and their operational value in the eyes of their producers and viewers. Connectedness is another fundamental Gestalt principle, meaning that ‘connecting different graphic objects by lines is a very powerful way of expressing that there is some relationship between them’.¹⁷ This principle is employed in the production of late antique and early medieval monograms, whereby phonetic characters are connected within a single graphic structure to indicate their joint use in a hidden word or words. A third sensory principle is that visual perception is highly sensitive to perfectly vertical and horizontal lines, which makes them a highly efficient tool in the graphic organization of information.¹⁸ This factor partly explains the popularity of the sign of the cross—composed precisely of such lines—across different cultures and times, but in the late antique Mediterranean in particular. Even more pertinent to our discussion is the perceptual principle according to which human eyes tend to see a closed contour as an object. This principle is highly important for visual communication since ‘the object metaphor is persuasive in the way we think about information, no matter how abstract’.¹⁹ As a result, closed contours such as a circle and square are commonly used to visualize various concepts.²⁰ That the first late antique monograms were of a square shape is highly significant in this regard, as is the fact that circles in the form of wreaths or medallions often framed such monograms, as well as christograms and the sign of the cross.

This use of object-like graphic forms as proxies for concepts and abstract ideas stems from the known ability of the human brain to link certain pieces of visual information to certain pieces of verbal information, in what neuroscientists call ‘cell assembly’ and the ‘neuronal network’.²¹ Thus, seeing certain objects momentarily activates connected parts of verbal memory.²² More importantly for my argument, modern research in cognitive psychology suggests that certain visual signs, including religious symbols, become cognitively bound to a particular non-visual cluster of concepts: viewing religious symbols such as the cross or a christogram causes an automatic and rapid activation of related concepts in the human mind.²³ Through their power to rapidly invoke nonvisual information from the long-term memory, such graphic signs thus function as a form of memory extension.²⁴ Such symbols can also produce certain associations and emotional responses from their viewers, an ability that is highly important for commercial usage of modern brand

¹⁷ Ware, *Information Visualization*, p. 182.

¹⁸ Ware, *Visual Thinking*, p. 57.

¹⁹ Ware, *Information Visualization*, p. 293.

²⁰ Ware, *Information Visualization*, pp. 186–7 and 222–4.

²¹ Stock, Gajsar, and Güntürkün, ‘The Neuroscience of Memory’, pp. 373–5.

²² Ware, *Information Visualization*, pp. 311–15.

²³ Ware, *Visual Thinking*, pp. 124–5 and 168–9.

²⁴ Ware, *Information Visualization*, p. 377.

logos—such as the Coca-Cola, Nike, or Adidas logos, each estimated to be worth billions of dollars. Early Christian graphic signs prompted even stronger emotional responses from their Christian viewers, especially when they appeared in natural settings or visions, or were employed in ritual performance. Modern companies invest vast amounts of money in advertisement and other forms of branding to make their logos recognizable, encouraging positive emotional responses to them in the minds of their potential consumers, and thus providing emotional leverage to the brand owners. In the 1990s some brands even began to promote themselves as a way of life, a set of values, an idea, or an attitude embodied by the products marked with their logos.²⁵ In a different manner, early Christians were familiarized with their religion's graphic signs through liturgy and material settings, while incessant comments in early Christian texts ensured that such signs were bound in the minds of their readers to major Christological and ethical tenets, and the corresponding way of life and attitudes. Thus, for example, in the passage mentioned above in this introduction, Augustine propagated the sign of the cross to his readers as the paradigmatic visual symbol of Christianity encouraging the faithful to believe in Christ and salvation and to act accordingly.²⁶ In the Christian world of late antiquity such graphic signs began to be actively employed as quasi-logos, not only in religious but also in socio-political interactions. Through this fusion of religious and political meanings, Christian graphic signs became salient visual features of the contemporary political landscape.

A more contextualized discussion of christograms and monograms takes us from the sensory principles of graphic visualization to arbitrary visual symbols and aspects of graphic representation that are culturally specific and historically limited. In most cases, however, graphic signs employ both sensory and arbitrary codes of graphic composition.²⁷ For instance, the chi-rho sign uses the principle of connectedness, but the original choice of the letters chi and rho did not relate to any sensory principle, and was defined by the cultural settings of the classical world.

Whereas in visual studies (especially in the US) visual perception and visual communication have been discussed with reference to 'visual thinking', 'visual literacy', and 'information visualization', in education studies (particularly in the UK) the unique nature of these phenomena have been described with reference to 'graphicacy'. This concept appeared at roughly the same time as Arnheim's concept of visual thinking. In the mid-1960s, the British scholars W. G. V. Balchin and Alice M. Coleman coined graphicacy as a term to describe the intellectual skill required both to understand visual aids such as maps, photographs, charts, and graphs, and to communicate using these tools. Graphicacy, they stated, therefore needed to be taught in school alongside literacy and numeracy.²⁸ In tandem with the rise of the field of visual studies from the 1990s, graphicacy became an

²⁵ For more details, see Klein, *No Logo*, especially pp. 3–124.

²⁶ *De doctrina Christiana*, II. 150, ed. and trans. Green, pp. 128–9.

²⁷ Ware, *Information Visualization*, pp. 9–12.

²⁸ Balchin and Coleman, 'Graphicacy—the Fourth "Ace"': Balchin and Coleman, 'Graphicacy Should Be the Fourth Ace'.

established concept in educational psychology,²⁹ and consequently entered English dictionaries. Thus, *The Merriam–Webster Dictionary* defines graphicacy as ‘the ability to understand, use, or generate graphic images (as maps and diagrams)’, while *The Oxford English Dictionary* describes it as ‘knowledge of or skill in the use of graphical information; the ability to produce or interpret diagrams, maps, tables, etc.’ In contrast to these established definitions, Xenia Danos has recently suggested a much broader interpretation of graphicacy as ‘the ability to communicate through still visual images such as graphs, maps, diagrams, symbols and drawings’, and has argued for its similarity to the category of visual literacy commonly used in the US.³⁰

A strong focus amongst scholars of graphicacy on maps and diagrams has also led to an emphasis on the crucial role of this intellectual skill in the communication of spatial information, which in turn has connected graphicacy studies to modern research on visuospatial cognition³¹—research that deals with both the cognitive mechanism involved in coding spatial relations of the real world through visual aids such as maps, diagrams, and graphs, and with the use of such forms of spatial representations within thinking in general.³² Cross-disciplinary fertilization has led to graphicacy being defined not only as an intellectual skill but also as a major form of communication on a par with oracy (orality), literacy, and numeracy. Thus, as early as 1999, a South African specialist in education studies, Pamela Dianne Wilmot, stated: ‘Graphicacy is a form of communication in that it utilizes some form of symbolic language to convey information about spatial relationships. . . . [I]t requires that the reader/creator of graphic language possesses conceptual knowledge of the phenomena represented in the graphic representation, as well as perceptual abilities and an understanding of spatial concepts.’³³

Modern research has further shown that spatial concepts are highly relevant to the process of abstract thinking. Thus, cognitive linguists have pointed to the paramount importance of spatial metaphors in our language,³⁴ while the empirical research of cognitive psychologists has demonstrated that people systematically attribute specific spatial relations to abstract concepts such as hope, success, and respect.³⁵ Graphicacy, therefore, can be defined as a form of communication, related to the graphic visualization of information and based on the capacity of

²⁹ See, for example, Boardman, ‘Graphicacy in the Curriculum’; Boardman, *Graphicacy and Geography Teaching*; Boardman, ‘Graphicacy Revisited’; Weiner, ‘A Test of Graphicacy’. For a more detailed overview of this kind of research, see Danos, *Graphicacy*, pp. 18–29.

³⁰ Danos, *Graphicacy*, p. 2. It is noteworthy in this regard that ‘Graphicacy’ has been chosen as a company name by one of the American dot-coms in data visualization, information graphics, graphic design, motion graphics, and so on.

³¹ de Vega et al., eds, *Models of Visuospatial Cognition*; Shah and Miyake, eds, *The Cambridge Handbook of Visuospatial Thinking*.

³² Tversky, ‘Functional Significance’; Newcombe and Learmonth, ‘Development of Spatial Competence’.

³³ ‘Graphicacy as a Form of Communication’, pp. 91–2.

³⁴ Lakoff, *Women, Fire*; Lakoff and Johnson, *Metaphors*; Bloom, ed., *Language and Space*; Pinker, *The Stuff of Thought*.

³⁵ Richardson et al., ‘“Language Is Spatial”’; Richardson et al., ‘Spatial Representations’; Libby and Elbach, ‘The Role of Visual Imagery’, p. 161.

human perception to process object-like visual signs and symbols, and their spatial relationships within more complex graphic representational systems, as proxies for concepts and abstract thought. Whilst this capacity is universal, the ability to communicate conceptual information through specific graphic devices depends on a person's familiarity with certain cultural systems of graphic visualization,³⁶ which are usually historically specific.

The vast majority of graphicacy studies to date have concentrated on maps, diagrams, and graphs, because of their importance to modern educational practices. Even though some scholars, such as W. G. V. Balchin, list many other categories of graphicacy, including traffic signs, health and safety symbols, national flags, and heraldic devices,³⁷ such categories remain subordinate to the aforementioned graphic forms of graphicacy in scholarship. But this established hierarchy of graphic forms is itself a by-product of modernity. Existing evidence indicates that maps and diagrams had a very limited circulation in late antiquity and the Middle Ages, and in these historical periods it is probable that less than 1 per cent of the population could encode or decode information using such graphic representational systems. In further contrast to the modern age, graphic communication in the late antique Mediterranean and in early medieval Europe was defined by its eclectic corpus of graphic signs of diverse origin and nature, the use of which was facilitated by the very same visuospatial ability of human cognition that generated modern forms of graphicacy. At the same time, such graphic signs originated and operated within a profoundly different cultural system of visual representation in a world of different media, a cultural context that I have discussed elsewhere with reference to the concept of early graphicacy.³⁸

The typical forms of early graphicacy—‘pop graphicacy’, as it were—combined basic graphic shapes and lines with decorative symbols, employed glyphic and glottographic characters, some of which were invested with symbolic meanings and perceived transcendent properties, and encoded names as well as words and phrases of symbolic importance in some instances. These graphic devices of a hybrid nature defy the artificial dichotomy of text and image, because they employ letters and words as para-textual elements and isolated decorative symbols as para-iconographic phenomena—both dominated by the signs’ graphic networks of spatial organization.

0.2. GRAPHIC SIGNS OF AUTHORITY AND POLITICAL CULTURE

This introduction to the graphic signs of authority in late antiquity and the early Middle Ages has thus far neglected to provide a precise definition of its basic constituting unit. ‘Graphic sign’ is a notion that is often considered to be self-explanatory.

³⁶ Postigo and Pozo, ‘On the Road to Graphicacy’, p. 641.

³⁷ ‘Graphicacy and the Primary Geographer’.

³⁸ For more details, see Garipzanov, ‘The Rise of Graphicacy’.

For this reason, dictionaries and manuals of graphic signs either fail to define the term,³⁹ or offer somewhat reductive definitions, as in *Shepherd's Glossary of Graphic Signs and Symbols*: 'Any written, printed or carved mark which is used conventionally to convey an idea.'⁴⁰ Moreover, the term has neither an established definition, shared across various fields in the humanities, nor one which features prominently in academic works of cultural history. When one is employed, it has traditionally been discussed as referring to visual signs of various kinds operating in a number of semiological systems, with post-Saussurian semiotics providing a common theoretical framework for its conceptualization⁴¹—as, for instance, in Walter Mignolo's discussion of native writing practices in Latin America: 'Semiotically, a graphic sign is, then, a physical sign on a solid surface made with the purpose of establishing a semiotic interaction.'⁴² Any human-made mark on solid surface can thus be defined as a graphic sign, as long as it conveys shared meaning/s (i.e. signifies something) to its producers and audiences.

This definition of the graphic sign is akin to Charles S. Peirce's broad notion of sign as equivalent with any kind of meaning, and the Peircean classical division of signs can similarly be applied to visual graphic forms.⁴³ Based on a sign's relation to referent, Peirce distinguished three types of signs (signifiers), which now are often viewed as 'universal meaning-making principles':⁴⁴ namely icons, indices, and symbols. Iconic signs signify by resemblance/likeness; indexical signs signify by contiguity, i.e. existential or physical connection of some kind; and symbolic signs signify by convention.⁴⁵

Most graphic signs fall into the latter two groups. After all, 'the more relevant the graphic aspects of a sign's gestalt are to its meaning, the more it is likely to be pictorial in nature',⁴⁶ which will take it into another domain of visual communication, namely that of picture signs and figurative art. Compared to pictures, graphic signs tend to be simpler and more abstract in their form,⁴⁷ and their relationship to the signified is less direct. Many of them function as indexical signs, such as christograms and monograms originating in the Graeco-Roman world as indexes for names. These monograms were connected to their referents through the use of identical letters, rearranged in visual webs of new spatial relations. Thus, the late antique bishop Avitus of Vienne referred to his own monogram as the *indicium* (disclosure, indication, or evidence) of his name ('Signum monogrammatism mei per gyrum scripti nominis legatur indicio').⁴⁸ Meanwhile, the Latin term *indicium* can also be translated as 'sign', and it is in this more narrow sense that the term 'sign' is often employed in academic discourse as a substitute for the indexical sign

³⁹ See, for example, Frutiger, *Signs*; and Post, *Saints, Signs*.

⁴⁰ Shepherd, *Shepherd's Glossary*, p. 26.

⁴¹ For the criticism of Saussure's privileging of spoken languages and his emphasis on the phonic substance in the concept of a sign, see Holdcroft, *Saussure*, pp. 39–42.

⁴² Mignolo, *The Darker Side*, p. 78.

⁴³ Short, *Peirce's Theory*, pp. 164–72; Sonesson, 'The Cognitive Semiotics', pp. 39–40.

⁴⁴ Stöckl, 'In Between Modes', p. 26.

⁴⁵ Short, *Peirce's Theory*, pp. 214–23; Atkin, 'Peirce's Theory'.

⁴⁶ Stöckl, 'Typography', p. 207.

⁴⁷ Stötzner, 'Signography', pp. 285–7.

⁴⁸ Avitus Viennensis, *Epistolae ad diversos*, 87 (78), in *Alcimi Aviti opera*, ed. Peiper, p. 97.

and juxtaposed with the term 'symbol'.⁴⁹ For the graphic signs discussed in this book, such a distinction between indexical and symbolic signs is neither straightforward nor productive. It is of course true that the sign of the cross developed a number of symbolic meanings in late antique Christian society and thus functioned as a true symbol. But it cannot be said that the lexical content of christograms was accessible to most Latin readers, as Lactantius' famous yet perplexing description of Constantine's victorious sign makes quite obvious. Most people in late antiquity were even less capable of comprehending the linguistic meanings of most monograms, and a shift in 'modes of signification'⁵⁰ accompanied the cultural transmission of monograms on their way from producers and recipients to external observers. For the latter category, monogrammatic signs were often nothing more than abstract visual symbols of noble status and authority, or empowering graphic devices with supernatural qualities. Monograms thus embodied shifting cultural attitudes, social hierarchies, and political power. In doing so, they did not differ much from graphic signs in general, which are in a state of permanent flux while travelling 'from person to person, from age to age, from country to country, from one domain of use to another'.⁵¹

Although similar to other types of signs in their communicative aspects, graphic signs differ in having specific visual properties, and they can also be classified according to their visual shapes.⁵² Frank Kammerzell has emphasized the importance of this aspect in his definition of the graphic sign as 'a visible mark that is deliberately produced by a human being on an appropriate carrier and embodies a particular shape and a corresponding piece of information intended by its producer'.⁵³ Some primary graphic forms have been universal for different cultures—such as a square/box or circle pervading the world of graphic signs in late antiquity and the early Middle Ages⁵⁴—and contemporary thinkers invested such forms with a range of symbolic meanings. Thus, for an early patristic author such as Clement of Alexandria, the regular proportions of the square form symbolized security and functioned as a blueprint for all other things in the world,⁵⁵ while Plotinus and Pseudo-Dionysius saw the circle as a shape that likened the human soul with the divine intelligences.⁵⁶ Another primary graphic form popular in modern graphic design, the triangle, is notable for its rare use in the late antique or early medieval world. In this period, the cruciform shape gradually became the most popular form of graphic sign, and this development visualized the successful process of Christianization, as well as the ubiquitous presence of the sign of the cross in early medieval visual culture. The shameful sign of capital punishment was thus

⁴⁹ For a different interpretation of the complex relationship between 'sign' and 'symbol' in academic discourse, see Jung, 'Ziehen'.

⁵⁰ Gross, *Lesezeichen*, p. 76; and Stöckl, 'Typography', p. 206.

⁵¹ Stötzner, 'Signography', p. 300.

⁵² Stötzner, 'Signography', p. 286; Frutiger, *Signs*, pp. 43–51.

⁵³ 'Defining Non-Textual Marking Systems', p. 278.

⁵⁴ These graphic forms were also used by prehistoric Europeans in the Upper Paleolithic era: von Petzinger, *The First Signs*.

⁵⁵ Clement of Alexandria, *The Stromata, or Miscellanies*, 6. 11, p. 500.

⁵⁶ For more details, see Chapter 4.

transformed into a beautiful symbol of transcendent power and divine authority,⁵⁷ which left a noticeable imprint on the visual world of early medieval graphic signs. This change epitomized the cultural transformation of the late antique Mediterranean world and early medieval Europe.

In addition to differentiating graphic signs by their visual forms and their semiotic relation to referents, Andreas Stötzner has suggested dividing them by the nature of their referents, into informative signs signifying things, phonemes, words, and ideas, and emblematic signs signifying people, human collectives, and institutions.⁵⁸ Whereas this distinction might be applicable to the taxonomy of modern signs, it is much less productive for late antique and early medieval graphic devices. For example, signs such as christograms and monograms can be defined as emblems, but they also encoded words, and often symbolized ideas. Furthermore, Stötzner's distinction is made with reference to modern Western secularized culture. Late antique and early medieval culture was defined by a universal belief in the reality of supernatural forces, and thus many graphic signs were hardly perceived by their contemporaries as passive communicative or emblematic means. Some, such as occult graphic characters or Christian signs, were believed to function as active agents, capable of affecting the transcendent world on behalf of their producers, bearers, or viewers. For such devices, therefore, the process of their production and their use in specific ritual settings were of utmost importance. When properly employed in late antiquity and the early Middle Ages, performative signs of this kind were perceived to act as independent agents of religious and social interaction, as powerful as Byzantine icons in the post-Iconoclastic era.

The signs repeatedly mentioned in this introduction—such as the cross, christograms, occult graphic characters, and monograms—represent a large group of late antique and early medieval graphic signs that were to a varying degree involved in the representation and communication of transcendent and secular authorities, and for this reason they can be defined as graphic signs of authority. Due to their symbolic function, such devices encoded graphic information of a more abstract nature than the non-textual marks of producers that appeared on various material artefacts in the classical world. It is true that many graphic signs created by lesser authorities were inspired by this earlier tradition of producer marks; in some cases, it is hard to draw a precise dividing line between the two visual phenomena—for instance, in the case of the monogrammatic signs of officials in charge of production that were stamped on material artefacts in early Byzantium. Yet the graphic marks of producers primarily encoded concrete information referring to a specific master, workshop, or mint, and as such differed from the graphic signs of authority in the Roman sense of the latter term (*auctoritas*): 'authority as guarantee; authority as origin or creation; and authority as personal prestige.'⁵⁹ Such *auctoritas* was primarily moral authority, i.e. 'the capacity to inspire respect', as claimed first by

⁵⁷ Viladesau, *The Beauty of the Cross*, pp. 3–17.

⁵⁸ Stötzner, 'Signography', pp. 291–3.

⁵⁹ Krieger, 'The Idea of Authority', p. 258. See also Furedi, *Authority*, pp. 59–69 and 95–102.

the Roman senate and emperors, and later by early Christian ecclesiastical leaders; its outward signs and symbols were 'eminently communicable and transferrable'.⁶⁰

The notion of authority remains culture-dependent. In modern, largely secularized society, where authority is perceived as the 'legitimate power to command and to secure obedience',⁶¹ graphic signs of political authorities and visual symbols of a religious and occult nature are usually considered separately. Yet this distinction appears rather anachronistic when applied to late antiquity and the Christian Middle Ages, where authority was commonly juxtaposed with coercive power,⁶² where divine and supernatural entities were credited with real presence in the human world, and where imperial or royal authority was increasingly endowed with transcendent properties. In this world, secular and ecclesiastical agents and divine and transcendent forces overlapped within hierarchies of powers, and their competing claims to authority established a plurality of authorities in late antique and early medieval society.⁶³ In this competitive environment of human and transcendent 'claimants', their graphic signs became invested with varying degrees of authority in concurrent society and its political culture.

Since its introduction by Gabriel A. Almond in 1956, 'political culture' has become an important category in academic research of politics and political culture, offering an alternative approach to more traditional studies of 'institutions' and 'political thought'. The category of 'political culture' was designed to attract more attention to the issue of how people interact with their political system, and to how people's behaviour, attitudes, and beliefs affect that system, although various political scientists have emphasized different aspects of this interaction. Consequently, they have defined political culture in various ways—for example, as 'a particular pattern of orientation in political action' with reference to attitudes towards politics, political values, ideologies, national character, and cultural ethos;⁶⁴ as 'a system of political symbols' involved in political communication;⁶⁵ or as 'publicly common ways of relating'.⁶⁶

The same variability and indeterminacy have characterized the category of political culture in historical studies, where it became a buzzword as early as the 1980s.⁶⁷ As Ronald Formisano commented, in those years '[p]robably no two historians defined political culture (explicitly or implicitly) in the same way'.⁶⁸ This statement remains valid to the present day, although in line with the increasing popularity of cultural history, historians—and medievalists in particular—have

⁶⁰ Hopfl, 'Power, Authority', pp. 219 and 221.

⁶¹ Krieger, 'The Idea of Authority', p. 253. For other relevant modern discussions of the concept of authority and its historical developments, see Arendt, 'What is Authority?'; Lincoln, *Authority*, pp. 1–6; Christiano, 'Authority'; Agamben, *State of Exception*, pp. 74–88; Furedi, *Authority*.

⁶² Oakeshott, *Lectures*, p. 293; Furedi, *Authority*, pp. 1–2.

⁶³ On a secular-religious dichotomy not being useful for late antiquity in this period, see e.g. Rapp, *Holy Bishops*, p. 6.

⁶⁴ Almond, 'Comparative Political Systems', p. 396. For a slightly modified definition, see Almond and Verba, *The Civic Culture*.

⁶⁵ Dittmer, 'Political Culture', p. 566.

⁶⁶ Chilton, 'Defining Political Culture', p. 427.

⁶⁷ For detailed discussions of these developments in political science and historical studies in the last third of the twentieth century, see Gendzel, 'Political Culture'; and Formisano, 'The Concept of Political Culture'.

⁶⁸ Formisano, 'The Concept of Political Culture', p. 414.

become much more interested in the ‘cultural’ dimension of political culture and have commonly studied the latter in a manner inspired by Clifford Geertz’s ‘thick descriptions’.⁶⁹

Thus, for instance, for Levi Roach, later Anglo-Saxon political culture is very much a ‘culture of signs and symbols’.⁷⁰ By contrast, John Watts sees political culture in late medieval Europe as consisting essentially of ‘three non-governmental kinds of structure’, namely media (education, art and architecture, preaching, books, conversations, and so on), social networks (lordship and service, patronage and clientage, families, dynasties, and clans), and ideology (political ideas, language or rhetoric, attitudes, and assumptions).⁷¹ Taking a different approach to Watts, Geoffrey Koziol describes the political culture of France from the tenth to twelfth centuries with reference not only to the fundamental political values and mimetic power of kingship, alongside the limited role of noble women in politics, but also to the material foundations of secular power.⁷² These examples illustrate Formisano’s point, yet they also point to the futility of offering yet another definition of political culture.

This book does not aim to do so. It is here sufficient to point out that this category refers to cultural settings—both real and imagined—in which politics, political order, and polities are embedded, and that these settings may differ considerably across various historical contexts. More important for this monograph is one specific suggestion that I would like to make, namely that graphic signs of authority should be viewed as an immanent part of symbolic communication pertinent to political culture and its media.⁷³ Through their cognitive potential to function as proxies for abstract ideas and concepts, these forms of early graphicacy functioned as a visual medium expressing and communicating widely shared ideas, assumptions, attitudes, beliefs, and patterns of symbolic behaviour relating to the nature, as well as the various sources and forms, of authority in late antiquity and the early Middle Ages. A contextualized up-to-date study of such graphic signs is therefore capable of providing new insights into a visual aspect of contemporary political culture, studies of which have traditionally been framed by late antique and early medieval written discourses.

0.3. GRAPHIC SIGNS OF AUTHORITY: HISTORIOGRAPHIC TRENDS

The existing literature on the history of graphic signs discussed in this book is divided into two disconnected groups. Firstly, a substantial number of detailed academic studies exist dedicated to specific groups or particular graphic signs,

⁶⁹ For overviews of political culture studies in medieval history, see e.g. Carpenter, ‘Introduction’; and Stofferahn, ‘Resonance and Discord’.

⁷⁰ *Kingship*, pp. 209–10.

⁷¹ *The Making of Polities*, pp. 129–57.

⁷² ‘Political Culture’, pp. 43–76.

⁷³ Elsewhere I have discussed this type of communication with reference to the symbolic language of authority; see Garipzanov, *The Symbolic Language*.

which are barely known outside specialized academic disciplines; secondly, there are a few non-specialist overviews of varying quality, addressed to collectors and the general public, such as Otto C. Flämig's compendium of medieval and early modern monograms (2003) and Robert Feind's manual of Byzantine monograms (2011).⁷⁴ Publications in this second category have doubtlessly stimulated interest in the topic among a wider readership, but to the best of my knowledge, no academic book since Viktor Gardthausen's monograph on early monograms (1924)⁷⁵ has attempted to present a broad analytical study of large graphic data of this kind covering a long historical time span.

Utilizing his academic background in ancient history as well as Greek and Latin palaeography, Viktor Gardthausen (1843–1925) was able to compile a broad survey of classical and early medieval monograms in the Latin West and the Greek East. His work took into account a wide range of graphic evidence brought into scholarly discourse in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. For this reason, his study remains the key reference work on the subject in modern academic literature. Yet his detailed discussion of various monogrammatic types and samples lacked the necessary cultural contextualization of particular graphic signs, and in some cases he interpreted certain monograms in ways later shown to be erroneous. Almost a century since its original publication, his book has also become outdated in terms of its corpus of graphic evidence.

Gardthausen's monograph benefited from a number of specialized reports, articles, and notes on the history of graphic signs in antiquity that appeared before World War I and in the Interwar period, a body of material that demonstrated an avid engagement in this research subject among both ancient historians and philologists, alongside specialists in early Christianity. With an academic background in classical philology, the work of Franz Dornseiff (1888–1960) was representative of the first group of scholars, and his German book (1922) on the use of letters in ancient mystic and 'magical' practices is still referred to in modern studies of ancient gematria and isopsephy.⁷⁶ Writing in the same period, the German theologian and church historian, Franz Joseph Dölger (1879–1940), exemplified the growing interest of specialists of early Christianity and Christian archaeology in the history of Christian symbols and signs. His unfinished book on the various uses and symbolic meanings of the sign of the cross in the first millennium AD, which was posthumously published by his pupils as a series of essays in the late 1950s and 1960s, remains an important reference work on that topic.⁷⁷

Dornseiff's and Dölger's erudite studies also highlight the gradual fragmentation of the scholarly field that explores graphic signs, a result of the growing professionalization of academic disciplines over the course of the twentieth century.

⁷⁴ Flämig, *Monogramme*; Feind, *Byzantinische Monogramme*. For a critical review of the later work by Werner Seibt, see *JÖB*, 61 (2011), 252–3.

⁷⁵ *Das alte Monogramm*.

⁷⁶ Dornseiff, *Das Alphabet*. This book derived from his PhD on the mysticism of letters, defended in Heidelberg in 1916; Dornseiff, *Buchstabenmystik*.

⁷⁷ Dölger, 'Beiträge zur Geschichte des Kreuzzeichens I–IX'. Klauser, *Franz Joseph Dölger*, pp. 100–1.

Consequently, such research has become divided into highly specialized academic disciplines according to various types of graphic signs and/or the media on which they appeared, and has thus lost some of its appeal amongst scholars more focused on political and socio-economic history.⁷⁸

In this process of professionalization, such specialized disciplines have also developed considerably different approaches to graphic evidence. Thus, specialists in early Christianity and Christian archaeology—such as Carlo Cecchelli (1893–1960),⁷⁹ Erich Dinkler (1909–81),⁸⁰ Jack Finegan (1908–2000),⁸¹ Larry Hurtado,⁸² and Bruce Longenecker⁸³—have focused on early Christian signs (the sign of the cross and christograms), and analysed their symbolic meanings and wider theological contexts as reflected in the writings of early Christian fathers. Archaeologists, however, have never systematically analysed the use of such graphic signs on mass-produced objects and public monuments, and we still lack a comprehensive overview of such symbolic usage in terms of media, chronology, and regional variation.

Early Christian signs have traditionally been treated separately from another group of graphic signs widespread in the Mediterranean world in the first millennium AD and related to transcendent powers: occult *charactera* and mystical seals. These esoteric graphic signs have been discussed by students of deviant religious practices and related material artefacts such as amulets and papyri, under the category of ancient magic—an academic field that was established around the turn of the twentieth century.⁸⁴ Consequently, for prominent specialists in ancient amulets—such as Campbell Bonner (1876–1954) or Roy Kotansky—these were defined as magical (or sometimes Gnostic) amulets, and graphic characters inscribed in such media have been commonly described in this academic field as magical signs.⁸⁵ Yet this traditional ‘magic’ approach to the study of occult signs has been questioned in recent years. Principally, many specialists in this field have admitted the difficulties of defining magic and separating it from religion,⁸⁶ with Bernd-Christian Otto in particular questioning the general scholarly use of the category of magic, instead historicizing it in terms of concurrent literary discourses.⁸⁷ More importantly, recent research has shown that Christians in Egypt and Syria not only used such occult characters in late antiquity but also sometimes did so syncretically with Christian symbols,⁸⁸ which means that the lines between Christian and occult graphic signs were less sharply drawn in late antiquity than

⁷⁸ This can be illustrated by a dictum on F. J. Dölger’s academic profile attributed to the renowned Russian-American classical historian Michail Rostovtsev (1870–1952): ‘Dölger ist kein Historiker, er ist ein Antiquar’ (‘Dölger is not a historian, he is an antiquarian’); Klauser, *Franz Joseph Dölger*, p. 110.

⁷⁹ *Il trionfo*. ⁸⁰ *Signum crucis*. ⁸¹ *The Archeology*.

⁸² *The Earliest Christian Artifacts*. ⁸³ *The Cross*.

⁸⁴ For more details, see Bremmer, ‘Preface’, p. 7.

⁸⁵ Bonner, *Studies*; Kotansky, *Greek Magical Amulets*. See also Frankfurter, ‘The Magic’; and Dickie, *Magic*.

⁸⁶ See e.g. Remus, ‘“Magic”’, pp. 268–72; Bremmer, ‘Preface’, pp. 10–12.

⁸⁷ Otto, *Magie*; Otto, ‘Towards Historicizing “Magic”’; Otto, ‘Historicising “Western Learned Magic”’.

⁸⁸ See Dickie, *Magic*, pp. 274–81; Spier, ‘An Antique Magical Book’; Gordon, ‘*Characteres*’.

the separated academic fields of early Christianity and ancient magic would suggest. The same holds true for the syncretic use of such signs on medieval textual amulets, which, as Don C. Skemer argues, was ‘a geographically widespread Western ritual practice at the nexus of religion, magic, science and written culture’.⁸⁹

Scholars of classical and medieval epigraphy, palaeography, diplomatics, sigillography, and numismatics have adopted an entirely different, largely taxonomic, approach to late antique and early medieval graphic signs—and most importantly, to monograms. They have usually discussed such signs under the rubric of *compendium scripturae*, that is, utilitarian devices employed in classical and medieval writing practices, primarily deployed to abbreviate personal names. Benet Salway’s definition of the monogram in the recently published *Oxford Handbook of Roman Epigraphy*—as a ‘shorthand method of identification that emerges in the epigraphic record in late antiquity’—is representative of this widely shared attitude.⁹⁰ From this perspective, it is hardly surprising that specialists in these auxiliary historical disciplines have considered classification and decoding to be their main tasks in studying monograms found on stone, parchment, seals, and coins. Consequently, some sigillographers and numismatists—like Vitalien Laurent (1896–1973) and Philip Grierson (1910–2006)—have produced various formal taxonomies of monograms as well as other graphic devices on specific late antique and early medieval media such as lead seals and coins, but they have rarely touched upon wider cultural contexts facilitating the appearance and popularity of these signs in late antiquity.⁹¹

In the past half century, such a taxonomic approach has been successfully used in Vienna to study the enormous corpus of early Byzantine monograms. In 1971, Walter Otto Fink defended an unpublished PhD thesis entitled *Das byzantinische Monogramm* (‘The Byzantine monogram’), in which sigillographic material was complemented by known evidence from architectural monuments, silver objects, rings, ivories, and coins. Fink attempted to establish some general principles used in the construction of these monograms, and to decode them utilizing a database of approximately five thousand known names and titles of early Byzantine officials.⁹² Yet despite such a systematic approach, he had to admit that a definitive resolution was only possible for monograms in very rare cases, and that his proposed variants of decoding were just one of several possible options.⁹³ Another Viennese sigillographer, Werner Seibt, has advanced this method further by checking all the readable letters of a monogram against the database of names, titles, and offices, in which the letters of each entry were listed in alphabetical order. This fruitful method produced a number of plausible matches. But still in 2016, Seibt had to acknowledge that even a limited combination of letters can be interpreted in many ways and connected with both common and rare names, without an absolute guarantee which particular one was encoded in a specific monogram. Monograms combining names with titles and offices are even less predictable for

⁸⁹ *Binding Words*, p. 5.

⁹⁰ Salway, ‘Late Antiquity’, p. 376.

⁹¹ Laurent, *Les sceaux byzantins*; Bellinger, Grierson, and Hendy, eds, *Catalogue*, vol. 2, pp. 107–11.

⁹² The method has been summarized in Fink, ‘Das frühbyzantinische Monogramm’.

⁹³ Fink, ‘Neue Deutungsvorschläge’, pp. 88–94.

deciphering, and Seibt admits that in some cases he has capitulated ‘in front of the mass of possible data’.⁹⁴ These results clearly show both the benefits and limitations of a formal taxonomic approach to the study of late antique monograms, as well as the need for contextual analysis to properly situate them as cultural phenomena—analysis that should take into account relevant written discourses, culturally defined assumptions and practices, and specific historical contexts.⁹⁵ When a specific context in which a monogram was created and used is all but lost or omitted, any suggested decoding and/or interpretation often remains mere hypothesis.

Hence, since the 1990s scholars have begun increasingly to take into account the historical, cultural, and material contexts in which specific monograms and other late antique and early medieval graphic signs operated, and to look at their usage outside the *compendium scripturae* straightjacket—as, for instance, in Carlo Carletti’s treatment of the so-called *Palma et laurus* monogram in the epitaphs of early Christian Rome, in Charlotte Roueché’s discussion of epigraphic monograms in late antique Aphrodisias and Ephesos, and in Antony Eastmond’s cultural contextualization of early Byzantine monograms.⁹⁶ In diplomatics, a similar approach has been propagated by Peter Rück (1934–2004) and his School of diplomatic semiotics at the *Institut für Historische Hilfswissenschaften* at Marburg.⁹⁷ In the pragmatic editorial introduction to the impressive collected volume on graphic symbols in medieval charters (1996)—including the cross, monograms, chrismons, and *rota*—Rück defined the task of diplomatic semiotics as follows: ‘to understand the charter as a system of linguistic, graphic, and material signs (codes) in a communicative process’,⁹⁸ and called for more attention to graphic symbols in this medium. Despite mixed responses to Rück’s approach,⁹⁹ his efforts have contributed to an increased awareness of the significant role that graphic *signa* and *nota* played in medieval charters and, more generally, of the importance of a material medium for the proper understanding of graphic signs. This awareness is evident in the current major project on *Material Text Cultures* (*Materiale Textkulturen*) at the University of Heidelberg. In spite of the project’s main focus on the materiality of writing and quasi-writing, its adoption of a contextualized approach to such ‘material texts’ is highly relevant for historical research on graphic signs.¹⁰⁰ In another drastic departure from traditional diplomatics inspired by

⁹⁴ ‘The Use of Monograms’, pp. 11–12.

⁹⁵ For a similar emphasis on the importance of contextual parameters with reference to Peircean semiotics, see Bedos-Rezak, *When Ego Was Imago*, pp. 60–71.

⁹⁶ See e.g. Carletti, ‘Un monogramma’; Roueché, ‘Looking for Late Antique Ceremonial’; Roueché, ‘Interpreting the Signs’; and Eastmond, ‘Monograms’.

⁹⁷ This approach was propagated by publications in the Marburg series *Elementa diplomatica*, with Peter Rück functioning as its academic editor; see e.g. Rück, *Bildberichte*; and Worm, *Karolingische Rekognitionszeichen*.

⁹⁸ ‘Ausgabe einer diplomatischen Semiotik ist es, die Urkunde als System von – sprachlichen, graphischen und stofflichen – Zeichen (Codes) in einem Kommunikationsprozeß zu begreifen...’, Rück, ‘Beiträge’, p. 13.

⁹⁹ For a sceptical response, see Kölzer, ‘Diplomatik’, pp. 20–3.

¹⁰⁰ <http://www.materiale-textkulturen.de> (accessed 19 July 2016). For the emphasis on a hermeneutic approach to the study of ‘material text’, see Hilger, ‘“Text-Anthropologie”’. See also volumes issued in the *Materiale Textkulturen* series that started in de Gruyters from 2014.

semiotics and semiotic anthropology, Brigitte Miriam Bedos-Rezak has recently argued that the medieval charter 'was an iconic document in which several systems of signs—the letter, the image, the heraldic emblem—entertained a symbiotic relationship', and that the charter's seal functioned 'as a sign, conveying identity, status, prestige, and power-covenant'—a sign combining text and image in a single discourse.¹⁰¹

Until recently, late antique and early medieval graphic signs remained in the shadows of figurative imagery in art history—more or less similar to their marginalization in traditional studies on literary culture. This situation reflected a deeply entrenched academic 'assumption that word and image commonly stand in opposition'.¹⁰² In response to this paradigm, the British art historian Michael Squire has even recently warned classicists and medievalists that 'our understanding of "texts" and "images" ... is socially, culturally and, above all, theologically invested'.¹⁰³ More specifically, the modern tendency to separate texts and images abruptly originated in the early modern period under the influence of Protestantism, which imposed a residual logocentrism upon the modern perception of images, whereby 'responses to images must follow verbally determined patterns of cultural response'.¹⁰⁴

At the same time, art historians studying the early medieval decorated book have dealt for quite a long time with the development of letter-based graphic forms in this medium. Thus, in 1970, Carl Nordenfalk discussed the late antique decorated initials that appeared in the fourth century as a new visual phenomenon, blurring the established borders between text and image;¹⁰⁵ and students of medieval illuminated manuscripts and Insular decorated books in particular have paid close attention to the interplay between script and image, to the graphic design of such books as a whole, and to ideographic ('extralinguistic') meanings of display letters and letter-based graphic forms, including the so-called 'monogrammatic initials'.¹⁰⁶

In recent years, art historical research on the interplay between word and image has benefited greatly not only from a methodological shift in art history, brought about by studies in visual studies and visual literacy, but also from interdisciplinary collaboration with cultural historians, palaeographers, epigraphers, and sigillographers. This transition is illustrated by a series of workshops at the Courtauld Institute of Art in London in 2010–11, which assembled both art historians and epigraphers. These colloquia generated a collected volume on the visual ('non-verbal') qualities of epigraphic writing and images disguised as words in the late antique and medieval Mediterranean and Near East (2015), which also considered the performative qualities of such epigraphic writing and pseudo-writing and their role in the construction of authority and identities.¹⁰⁷ The level of interdisciplinarity was even

¹⁰¹ *When Ego Was Imago*, pp. 27–9.

¹⁰² Eastwood, *Ordering the Heavens*, p. 420.

¹⁰³ Squire, *Image and Text*, p. 17.

¹⁰⁴ Squire, *Image and Text*, p. 8.

¹⁰⁵ *Die spätantiken Zierbuchstaben*.

¹⁰⁶ See e.g. Kendrick, *Animating the Letter*; Brown, *The Book*; Hamburger, 'The Iconicity'; Tilghman, 'The Shape'; and Hahn, 'Letter'.

¹⁰⁷ Eastmond, ed., *Viewing Inscriptions*.

higher at the international symposium convened by Brigitte M. Bedos-Rezak and Jeffrey F. Hamburger at Dumbarton Oaks, Washington, DC, in 2012, which brought together specialists in medieval art history, sigillography, diplomatics, and epigraphy, as well as in the anthropology of writing and non-Western writing systems. This conference resulted in an impressive collected volume (2016), which provides multidisciplinary insights into the history of ‘imagistic lettering’ or ‘script-images’ (reminiscent of Tom Mitchell’s notion of ‘imagetext’), i.e. hybrid signs formed through the fusion of letter and image, in the ancient and medieval Near East, Europe, Byzantium, and Latin America.¹⁰⁸

Such promising collaborative efforts demonstrate the effectiveness of an interdisciplinary approach to graphic signs, an approach that has been adopted in this book. It facilitates the coverage of graphic evidence on a wide range of media that, until recently, has almost never been studied collectively—such as various mass-produced objects and unique objects of arts, architectural monuments and epigraphic inscriptions, and manuscripts and charters. This approach also allows a synthetic study of graphic signs of authority that, as a result of compartmentalized academic traditions, have traditionally been treated as separate, and largely unrelated, phenomena.

0.4. CULTURAL HISTORY OF GRAPHIC SIGNS OF AUTHORITY

Whereas many academic accounts describe the cultural history of this transformative age from textual, art historical, or archaeological perspectives, with narratives necessarily driven by textual sources, figural imagery, and/or archaeological material, the following chapters focus on graphic signs of authority that are inscribed, engraved, stamped, carved, written, and drawn on different types of material artefacts. This study navigates this type of visual evidence with ‘illustrative’ (as it were) references to particular media, specific historical contexts, and relevant late antique and early medieval texts. In doing so, it aims to offer an alternative account of the cultural, religious, and socio-political transition from the late Graeco-Roman world to that of early medieval Europe—a diachronic narrative combining contextualized detailed discussions of representative graphic samples on various material objects, in a manner reminiscent of art historical studies, with overviews of general trends in the use of relevant graphic devices, akin to publications in cultural history and archaeology.

The following chapters examine the cultural history of graphic signs of authority in the late antique Mediterranean and early medieval Europe largely in chronological order. Part 1 presents the late antique history of graphic signs of authority relating to a transcendent sphere. Chapter 1 investigates the cultural context that contributed to the appearance and growing significance of the earliest Christian signs such as the chi-rho and tau-rho, and provides an overview of the diverse corpora of graphic

¹⁰⁸ See the editorial introduction in *Sign and Design*, pp. 1–16.

signs that were employed in the Imperial period as part of non-orthodox and alternative religious practices, traditionally referred to as 'Gnostic' or 'magical'. These specific historical conditions led to the earliest Christian signs functioning as visual symbols for nascent Christian communities, symbols referring to Christ and his salvific mission. At the same time, in the turbulent world of competing religious practices, where different graphic signs claimed various degrees of transcendent power and spiritual authority, early Christian signs were bound to acquire apotropaic properties. Furthermore, outside the normative world of early Christian dogmas and prescriptions, Christ and his saints had to prove their transcendent powers against fierce competition from more anonymous (but no less awe-inspiring) mystical forces, and many Christian laymen and even some clerics continued to employ occult graphic characters—often side by side with Christian symbols—in the late antique world, especially in the Eastern Mediterranean. Chapter 2 shows how in the fourth century the chi-rho symbol, complemented towards the end of that century by the tau-rho symbol, developed into a paradigmatic symbol of religious authority in the Roman empire. Parallel to that process, the Constantinian dynasty adopted the chi-rho as their imperial 'logo', appealing not only to Christians of lower status but also to imperial officials and the aristocracy, especially in the Western Roman empire. In doing so, Constantine the Great and his heirs differed little from their predecessors in the second half of the third century, who in addition to exploiting the moral authority of the Roman title of *principes* began to claim transcendent authority deriving from a special relation with divinities.¹⁰⁹ Chapter 3 surveys the theological, historical, and cultural contexts in the Roman world that, around the turn of the fifth century, transformed an ignominious symbol of capital punishment in the form of a tau-rho cross into the triumphant symbol of Christianity, a four-armed cross. Its visual similarity to some mystical *charactera* featuring four and eight arms probably contributed to its growing reputation for apotropaic power, so that the cross gradually came to be seen as superior to other graphic devices in its access to the supernatural. In the same period, Theodosian emperors and empresses appropriated the sign of the cross as their imperial 'logo', and placed it on different media of visual communication to propagate the profoundly Christian nature of their emperorship. Consequently, from the mid-fifth century onwards, this sign became an important symbol of imperial—and, later on, royal—authority.

Part 2 explores a specific feature of late antiquity: its unique monogrammatic culture. Chapter 4 discusses the classical origins of late antique monograms, which can be traced back to producers' marks in the classical world. In the Early Imperial period, emperors occasionally used their monograms on coins and glass vessels to guarantee their circulation and claim a monopoly on certain products. By the fourth century, monogrammatic signs developed into more sophisticated graphic devices, and began to encode personal names and ritualistic phrases, especially in Christian media such as funerary plaques in Roman catacombs. By creating their

¹⁰⁹ For the expression of that claim on third-century imperial coinage, see e.g. Manders, *Coining*, pp. 95–154.

own personal monograms, early Christians imitated—and thus appealed to the spiritual authority of—Christ, whose name was regularly expressed by the christograms. At the same time, many personal monograms placed in public spaces must have been viewed as useful protective devices against personal names being misused in concurrent ‘magical’ practices. Parallel to the rise of personal monogrammatic signs, the use of acclamatory and intercessory monograms spread in late antiquity due to a general belief in the efficacy of graphic devices as visual keys to the transcendent sphere. Their increasing use in symbolic communication accompanied the increasing popularity of acclamations in oral communication: both reflected the expanding role of ritualized forms of communication in late antiquity, and the transition from the mimetic visual culture of the classical world to the ‘ritual-centred’ visuality of the Middle Ages.¹¹⁰ In the fourth and fifth centuries, artistically designed personal monograms became a noticeable feature of Roman calligraphic culture and became visual symbols of social prestige in late Roman political culture. In some cases, such monograms were invested with hidden meanings decipherable only to a narrow circle of aristocratic elites—often with recourse to ideas deriving from late antique Neoplatonism or mystic Christianity. They thus marked social and cultural divisions equally. Chapter 5 traces the proliferation of monogrammatic culture on different material media in the second half of the fifth century and into the sixth, in particular in early Byzantium. In this period, monograms began to function as graphic signs of authority for emperors, imperial officials, ecclesiastical leaders, and kings. They also became visual symbols of social prestige for aristocrats, who proudly displayed them on personal luxury objects and dress accessories—people of lower status often copied this practice, no doubt attracted by the social prestige attached to personal monograms. In short, by the sixth century, monograms had developed into an established visual attribute of a late antique Christian *paideia*. Chapter 6 demonstrates the sixth-century expansion of this blossoming monogrammatic tradition, tracing its diffusion onto public monuments, and in particular into churches. Originating as ennobling graphic devices providing idiosyncratic honours to donors and commissioners, monumental monograms were first adopted by Justinian I and Theodora as graphic signs of imperial authority, carved in ecclesiastical settings for liturgical rituals of power—a practice followed by their imperial successors. Very soon after, church leaders imitated this innovation in various parts of the early Byzantine world, including Ravenna and Rome. The sixth-century appropriation of this imperial practice by ecclesiastical hierarchs visualized and monumentalized the concept that Christian bishops had an exclusive claim to spiritual authority deriving from God—a concept that Pope Gelasius I (492–6) had formulated in his writing some decades earlier, and that later became a cornerstone for the medieval doctrine of two powers.

Part 3 examines the adaptation and transformation of the above-mentioned late antique graphic traditions in early medieval Europe. Chapter 7 overviews their

¹¹⁰ Elsner, *Art and the Roman Viewer*, pp. 88–124; Elsner, ‘Between Mimesis and Divine Power’; and Squire, *Image and Text*, pp. 231–2 and 246–7.

history in the pre-Carolingian period. The use of monograms as signs of authority and social prestige by kings and high-status people in the Ostrogothic and Burgundian kingdoms shows an unbroken continuation of late Roman symbolic traditions. A real break with late Roman political culture took place in this sphere in the seventh and early eighth centuries, when in the modified political culture of early medieval Europe personal monograms lost their appeal as graphic signs of royal and imperial authority, and increasingly functioned as signs of authority for bishops and lesser local figures of power. Monogrammatic signs of collectives (important cities and monasteries) represent a new feature in these centuries, reflecting the changing roles of various agents in concurrent political culture. The diminishing role of monograms in this period coincided with the proliferation of Christian graphic devices—such as the sign of the cross and the invocational and intercessory devices of a cruciform shape—in various media. These intercessory graphic signs became especially popular in the early Byzantine world, where such cruciform devices became a dominant graphic mode employed in interactions with transcendent forces, before their role was undermined by the rise of icons in the post-Iconoclastic era. At the same time, ‘magical’ characters continued to exercise influence in private spaces, and were later transferred to late Byzantine and Muslim occult practices. In Western manuscript culture, late antique monogrammatic traditions led to the gradual development of a new medieval phenomenon from the seventh to eighth centuries, namely ‘monogrammatic’ initials, whereby some initials introduced important sections of a text by combining several letters in a monogram-like manner. Chapter 8 starts with the examination of such initials in Carolingian sacramentaries and gospel-books, and shows that some initials of that kind—such as *Vere dignum* and *Te igitur*, that introduced important sections of the Canon of the Mass—encoded ideas about God and His nature, and were influenced by the late antique tradition of acclamatory monograms. A further overview of the personal monograms introduced into Carolingian manuscript culture in the late eighth and ninth centuries confirms that late antique and contemporary Byzantine influences contributed to a monogrammatic revival in that period. At the same time, the Carolingian practice of monograms represented to a large extent a ‘re-invented’ tradition. Unlike in late antiquity, when personal monograms functioned as well-known graphic badges of aristocratic status and social prestige, monograms in Carolingian manuscripts represented a phenomenon limited to a narrow circle of Christian intellectuals that visualized the spiritual authority of monastic scribes, abbots, and bishops, itself derived from their unique status as transmitters and preservers of Christian knowledge, including the knowledge of rare scripts and cryptographic graphic devices. This invention also visualizes the transformation of the *foci* of authority that took place in Western Europe from the fourth to ninth centuries, a transition from imperial palaces and offices and aristocratic villas to royal and episcopal headquarters and royal monasteries. A predilection for cryptic graphic forms in educated monastic circles is exemplified by the appearance in this period of a compilatory text bringing together rare scripts, graphic characters, and monograms—a work known as *De inventione linguarum* or *De inventione litterarum* (‘On the Invention of Languages/Letters’).

Such rare graphic characters and devices were credited with the ability to interact with the transcendent world, a quality similar to that of the aforementioned 'magical' signs. The Carolingian period also witnessed the re-invention of the royal monogram as a graphic sign of authority appealing to the Roman imperial tradition and emphasizing the spiritual foundations of Carolingian kingship. The first Carolingian monogrammatic device of that kind, the monogram of Charlemagne, communicated such political concepts to his subjects through various media and gradually developed into a royal 'logo' of Carolingian authority, which was passed on to his heirs in the ninth and tenth centuries, along with the name 'Charles'. Yet the authority of this Carolingian royal 'logo' was a moonlight reflection of the greater transcendent power attributed at this time to the sign of cross. Chapter 9 shows the unmatched status of this graphic sign in the ninth century and its ubiquitous presence in manuscript culture as well as in other media of royal authority such as coins. Hrabanus Maurus' work in the genre of pattern poetry known as *In honorem sanctae crucis* ('In Honour of the Holy Cross') demonstrates the status of that sign as the paradigmatic visual symbol of authority in the Carolingian world. Hrabanus' 'imagetext' represented a unique achievement in the field of Carolingian graphicacy. More importantly for the cultural history of graphic signs, it highlighted the transition from the graphic universe of late antiquity, characterized by a plurality of competing visual claims to various kinds of authority toward a more hierarchically organized visual culture of the Carolingian world, where the sign of the cross emerged as the unmatched principle graphic symbol of authority for kings and bishops, nobles and clerics, and common people.

PART I

GRAPHIC SIGNS OF
DIVINE AUTHORITY IN
LATE ANTIQUITY

1

The Origins of Early Christian Graphic Signs

The sign of the cross has remained the most popular Christian graphic symbol from the early Middle Ages to the present day. In Europe and North America it is still omnipresent, not just in ecclesiastical settings but also in public spaces and in art. This sign has become engraved, as it were, onto the cultural code of many European countries, to the extent that it can define the designs of national flags or the logos of international charity organizations such as the Red Cross. Yet the rise of this graphic symbol to prominence was all but straightforward in the first Christian centuries, and the cross sign did not gain popularity in Christian culture until as late as the second half of the fourth and fifth centuries. Instead, the graphic signs of Greek origin known as chi-rho and tau-rho dominated the world of early Christian graphic symbols.

1.1. THE *NOMINA SACRA*, STAUROGRAM, AND CHI-RHO

One can trace the earliest usage of these two signs in early Christian manuscript culture, in which they were preceded by another related visual phenomenon known as *nomina sacra*. *Nomina sacra* appeared in both orthodox and ‘heterodox’ early Christian manuscripts, as special abbreviated forms of sacred names consisting of the first, last, and (in some cases) medial letters. The term itself was introduced by Ludwig Traube in the early twentieth century, who thought that this palaeographic practice expressed Christian reverence to names related to the divine sphere, in imitation of a similar Jewish written tradition in the Septuagint.¹ From the Hellenistic period, Hebrew texts employed a range of scribal techniques to hide the name of God, most often with the Tetragrammaton (יהוה, or YHWH in Latin), that only certain Jews could intone. On the one hand, this device safeguarded the sanctity of the divine name from misuse and, on the other, its secret nature could serve as an identifying visual marker within the Jewish community.² The Jewish reverence for divine names and the scribal practice of the Tetragrammaton thus probably acted as the main source of inspiration for the invention of the first *nomina sacra* among early Christians, many of whom were ethnic Jews. This early

¹ Traube, *Nomina sacra*, pp. 4–27.

² For more details and references, see Andrade, ‘The Jewish Tetragrammaton’.

Christian scribal practice almost certainly began in the late first century AD, and in the following centuries it developed into a consistent way of handling divine names in manuscripts.³ The precise functions of *nomina sacra* in early Christian manuscripts remain a matter of debate. Christopher Tuckett has interpreted them as nothing more than a reading aid,⁴ yet Jane Heath notes that *nomina sacra* obstructed rather than helped reading. Their visual distinctiveness, she argues, aligns *nomina sacra* with the tradition of memory aids that facilitated the contemplative reading of Christian texts: a practice typical of later monastic culture.⁵ Similarly, most scholars investigating this phenomenon in the context of Greek religious texts agree that *nomina sacra* appeared as a symbolic palaeographic feature in emerging Christian scribal culture, where they became a visual expression of Christian piety.⁶ It is in this context that Larry Hurtado has recently called such *nomina* ‘the earliest Christian “graphic signs”, combining textual and visual features’.⁷

The earliest *nomina sacra* presented abbreviated names of the two divine personae in Greek: Ἰησοῦς (Jesus), Χριστός (Christ), Θεός (God), and Κύριος (Lord). As abbreviations, these still belonged to the world of late classical literacy. Yet they also functioned as visual phenomena, and in such contexts appeared as graffiti and featured in early Christian mosaics from as early as the third century, in places like the house of St Peter at Capernaum and the prayer hall at Megiddo, both in northern Israel, and the *Domus ecclesiae* at Dura-Europos in Syria. In these media, *nomina sacra* expressed reverence for words related to salvation and its ultimate sources, God and Jesus Christ. *Nomina sacra* for Ἰησοῦς and Χριστός appear more frequently in this epigraphic material, which confirms that they already had some history of usage in texts. Moreover, this evidence shows that by the third century *nomina sacra* had become meaningful not just to scribes but to a variety of literate Christians.⁸ For the latter, inscribed *nomina sacra* seem to have functioned as a visual expression of their religious identity.⁹

From these *nomina sacra*, there was just one step to ‘proper’ Christian graphic signs, in which selected letters and graphic forms conflated to create single graphic structures. These visual symbols denoted Jesus Christ or the Crucifixion, for instance in the earliest palaeographic sign amongst them, the tau-rho (Fig. 1.1). This development occurred easily in a culture that used abbreviations extensively in texts, and in which joining ‘various letters to form a ligature was familiar to readers of the time, especially in documentary texts and inscriptions’.¹⁰ The tau-rho sign was thus soon followed by christograms, graphic signs composed of the conflated initials or the first two letters of Christ’s names: *XP* (chi-rho for Christ), *IH* (iota-eta for Jesus), and *IX* (iota-chi for Jesus Christ) (Fig. 1.1).

³ Roberts, *Manuscript*, pp. 26–48; Hurtado, ‘The Earliest Evidence’, pp. 271–88; Hurtado, *The Earliest Christian Artifacts*, pp. 95–134; Luijendijk, *Greetings*, pp. 57–62.

⁴ Tuckett, ‘“Nomina sacra”’, pp. 431–58.

⁵ Heath, ‘*Nomina sacra*’.

⁶ For more details and references, see Hurtado, *The Earliest Christian Artifacts*, pp. 122–32.

⁷ Hurtado, ‘Earliest Christian Graphic Symbols’, p. 29.

⁸ Wicker, ‘Pre-Constantinian *Nomina Sacra*’, pp. 71–2.

⁹ Luijendijk, *Greetings*, pp. 61–2; Gamble, *Books*, p. 78.

¹⁰ Hurtado, *The Earliest Christian Artifacts*, p. 138.

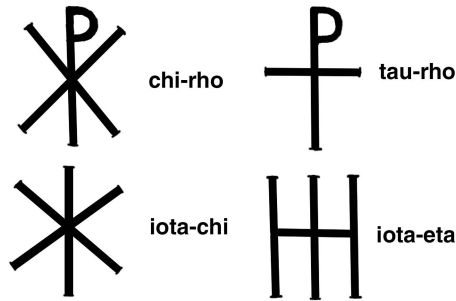


Fig. 1.1. Tau-rho and christograms: chi-rho, iota-eta, and iota-chi.

Before their appropriation for Christian usage, all of these symbols except for the iota-eta appeared in Greek inscriptions. For instance, the tau-rho sign can be found as an abbreviation for the word *τριακός* (thirty) in an inscription dated to the period between AD 69 and 96.¹¹ The chi-rho sign abbreviated words including *χρόνος* (time) and *χρυσός* (gold), and in an inscription dated to AD 138 it replaced the word *χιλιάρχης* (chiliarch).¹² Finally, the iota-chi represented an archaic form of the Greek letter psi.¹³ The chi-rho and tau-rho also appeared in a different context, as auxiliary signs in classical coinage. The chi-rho was used as a mintmark on the coins of Alexandria in Hellenistic Egypt as early as the third century BC,¹⁴ while the tau-rho appeared as an auxiliary mark on one of the coin issues struck by King Herod the Great in the third year of his reign (38/7 BC). Its precise meaning, however, remains a matter of debate.¹⁵ More certain is that when the tau-rho first appeared in New Testament manuscripts at the end of the second century AD, it functioned as an abbreviation for the Greek letters (*ταυρ*), forming the central part of the words *σταυρός* (cross) and *σταυρόω* (crucify).¹⁶ Hence, when this sign later emerged as a free-standing Christian symbol, it must already have become the staurogram, that is, a graphic reference to the crucified Jesus and Crucifixion, a symbolic reference to divine authority, and a visual expression of early Christian faith.¹⁷ Yet since the tau-rho abbreviated only part of the words related to Jesus' cross and Crucifixion, its transition to a free-standing staurogram was less than straightforward, and somewhat delayed.

¹¹ Avi-Yonah, *Abbreviations*, pp. 105 and 119.

¹² Avi-Yonah, *Abbreviations*, pp. 112 and 119; Turner, *Greek Manuscripts*, pl. 58.

¹³ Hurtado, *The Earliest Christian Artifacts*, pp. 138–9.

¹⁴ Abdy and Dowler, *Coins*, p. 79, fig. 5. See also Abdy, 'From Page', pp. 168–70 and figs 4–4a.

¹⁵ Kanael, 'The Coins'; Kanael, 'Ancient Jewish Coins', p. 48; Rappaport, 'Chapter 2. Numismatics', p. 41.

¹⁶ Hurtado, 'The Earliest Evidence', pp. 279–80; Hurtado, *The Earliest Christian Artifacts*, pp. 135–54.

¹⁷ For more details and references, see Dinkler, 'Älteste christliche Denkmäler', pp. 177–8; Aland, 'Neue neutestamentliche Papyri II', 10 (1963), pp. 75–9; and 11 (1965), pp. 1–3; Dinkler-von Schubert, 'CTAYPOC'; Hurtado, 'The Staurogram', pp. 207 and 224–6; Hurtado, *The Earliest Christian Artifacts*, pp. 135–54.

The symbol's origins explain why, when the solitary use of Christian monograms began to be attested across various media in the fourth century, the chi-rho overshadowed the staurogram and became the most frequently deployed Christian symbol in different media. In their symbolic usage, both signs were sometimes bolstered by the iota-chi and iota-eta, although these appear more rarely. Scholars have remained cautious of accepting the use of staurogram and chi-rho as free-standing Christian symbols before the age of Constantine I.¹⁸ Danilo Mazzoleni, for instance, has questioned a pre-Constantinian date for such symbols in early Christian catacombs in Rome.¹⁹ Equally, W. H. Buckler's earlier claim that the early third-century epitaph of Gaius at Eumeneia in Phrygia featured a blurred chi-rho cannot be confirmed due to the fair amount of chipping and weathering that the funerary stone has suffered.²⁰ The pre-Aurelian date (before the 270s) for two tau-rhos on the funerary plaque of Beratius Nikatoras, which was carved in a catacomb located in Rome within the Aurelian Wall, has also been questioned.²¹ The other features of this epitaph suggest its date to c.350–425.²²

Whilst there may thus be good reason for this scepticism in the case of the staurogram, however, it is rather misplaced in the case of the chi-rho. As Jeffrey Spier has recently demonstrated, the chi-rho was employed as a free-standing symbol on early Christian gems produced in Asia Minor and Syria from as early as the third quarter of the third century (Fig. 1.2a).²³ This indicates that the symbolic use of the chi-rho might have started amongst Greek-speaking communities in the third-century East, and took some time to reach Rome and the western provinces.

In their Christian usage, the tau-rho and chi-rho moved from the realm of literacy to that of early graphicacy. As abbreviations, such signs referred to specific words. Christian visual culture, in contrast, appropriated these utilitarian signs for qualitatively different purposes: as symbolic visual references to God and Christological concepts. Consequently, the combinations of letters that formed such graphic devices acquired ideographic meanings, a transformation made possible for two principle reasons. Firstly, Greek letters represented both specific phonetic characters and numbers, distinguished by a stroke above a letter functioning as a number. The letters' duality gave birth to the practice of isopsephy, whereby combinations of letters could be analysed not only phonetically but also according to their numeric values, and could thus be deciphered as hidden numbers with symbolic allusions.²⁴ This practice was not alien to early Christians since, as

¹⁸ Gardthausen, *Das alte Monogramm*, pp. 82–3; Sulzberger, 'Le symbole', pp. 447–8; Bruun, 'Symboles', pp. 97–8 and 156–7.

¹⁹ Mazzoleni, 'Origine'.

²⁰ Buckler, Calder, and Cox, 'Asia Minor', p. 63. Cf. Sheppard, 'Jews', p. 179 and pl. XXIIa–b, who states that 'the traces now visible on the stone are not reconcilable' with the chi-rho.

²¹ ICUR, vol. 5, no. 15420 (EDB, no. 316). For more details and references, see Bardill, *Constantine*, p. 163, fig. 101, note 36. On the date of the Aurelian Wall, see Dey, *The Aurelian Wall*, pp. 13–17.

²² Partyka, 'L'épithaphe'; Pleket and Stroud, 'Rome. Epitaph'. I would like to thank Angelos Chaniotis for discussing this epitaph with me.

²³ Spier, *Late Antique and Early Christian Gems*, pp. 30–4, where he lists about twenty such early gems with the chi-rho.

²⁴ See Dornseiff, *Das Alphabet*, pp. 96–106.

pointed out by François Bovon, they viewed names and numbers as intrinsically related.²⁵ Secondly, certain Hebrew, Greek, and later Latin letters had the potential for symbolic meaning, which led to various extralinguistic interpretations of these letters in late antiquity and the early Middle Ages.

1.2. EARLY CHRISTIAN AUTHORS ON SYMBOLIC MEANINGS OF LETTERS AND CHRISTIAN GRAPHIC SIGNS

The earliest Christian example of this kind of symbolic reading of specific letters survives in a passage from the *Epistle of Barnabas*, an early Christian text probably composed in Alexandria at the turn of the second century and—judged by the evidence of fourth-century Codex Sinaiticus—included in the early New Testament canon. The *Epistle* was written for a newly emerging Christian community with an urgent need to distinguish itself from the Jews and their reading of the Old Testament.²⁶ One of the ways to do so was to interpret various Old Testament stories exegetically, as symbolic references to the New Testament history. In the above-mentioned passage, the number of Abraham's servants (318) in Genesis 14. 14 is interpreted as a symbolic reference to Jesus (18=IH, the first two Greek letters of Jesus' name) and the grace of Redemption through his cross (300=T).²⁷ Clement of Alexandria reiterated this passage from the *Epistle of Barnabas* at the turn of the third century, and the text was well known to Christian intellectuals of the third and fourth centuries.²⁸ Such an isopsephic interpretation must have encouraged the later use of iota-eta as a graphic sign for Jesus, but more significantly, it echoes an early Christian view of tau as a symbol of the cross of Jesus and, more generally, of Crucifixion and Salvation. This view reflected the traditional shape of a stake employed for crucifixion in Roman times, which resembled an upright post with a crossbeam attached on the top.²⁹ Writing three centuries later, Isidore of Seville stated that tau had been inscribed in military rosters before the names of soldiers who survived a particular battle, while theta appeared before the names of fallen soldiers.³⁰ For people familiar with such a practice, tau carried with it a direct association with vitality, and—interpreted allegorically—with Christian salvation.

²⁵ Bovon, 'Names', p. 267. On numerical symbolism in early Christianity and its importance for Clement of Alexandria in particular, see Kalvesmaki, *The Theology*.

²⁶ Paget, *The Epistle of Barnabas*, pp. 9–70.

²⁷ *The Epistle of Barnabas*, 9. 7–9, ed. and rev. Holmes, pp. 408–9. For discussion, see Hurtado, 'The Earliest Evidence', p. 280; Hurtado, *The Earliest Christian Artifacts*, p. 147; and Bovon, 'Names', p. 281.

²⁸ Clement of Alexandria, *The Miscellanies, or Stromata*, 6. 11, p. 499. For the analysis of these textual references, see Dölger, 'Beiträge zur Geschichte des Kreuzzeichens I', pp. 14–16. On Clement and his text, see Heine, 'The Alexandrians', pp. 117–19.

²⁹ The similarity between the latter tau and a T-shaped cross (σταυρός) was also commented upon by contemporary pagan authors such as Lucian, *Is Consonantium* (= *Iudicium vocalium*), 12, p. 143. See also Shi, *Paul's Message*, p. 38.

³⁰ Isidore of Seville, *Etymologies*, 1. 24, p. 52. For more detailed discussion of this practice, see Dölger, 'Beiträge zur Geschichte des Kreuzzeichens II', pp. 20–2.

Second- and third-century Christian authors occasionally interpreted Old Testament passages concerning tau-shaped objects and biblical figures standing with arms stretched outward as symbolic prefigurations of Jesus on the cross. The mid-second-century author Justin Martyr, for example, presents such an interpretation in connection with Moses' adoption of Christ's symbolic posture in Exodus 17. 8–16 (first brought up in the *Epistle of Barnabas*), and in some other Old Testament passages (Numbers 17. 1–11; Psalms 1. 3; and 2 Kings 6. 1–7).³¹ Justin and other early Christian authors saw the symbolism of the tau-cross not only in the Old Testament past but also in their own days, and interpreted tau-cross shapes in various quotidian objects as the constant promise of salvation.³² In the early third century, Tertullian explained to his Latin readers the identification of Jesus' cross with the Greek letter tau by applying it to the similarly shaped Latin letter T:

... and He [Jesus] signed them with that very seal of which Ezekiel spake: 'The Lord said unto me, Go through the gate, through the midst of Jerusalem, and set the mark *Tau* upon the foreheads of the men.' Now the Greek letter *Tau* and our own letter T is the very form of the cross, which He predicted would be the sign on our foreheads in the true Catholic Jerusalem.³³

Here Tertullian referred to a well-known passage in Ezekiel 9. 4, in which the Lord ordered an angel to go through Jerusalem and place a mark on the foreheads of the chosen people. The word 'mark' is given with the word *taw* in the Hebrew original, which is also the name of the final letter in the Hebrew alphabet, itself phonetically identical with the Greek letter tau. The version of the Greek translation that Tertullian used in his exegesis accommodated this dual meaning, which early Christian authors understood to be a reference to the salvific tau-cross of Jesus Christ.

Earlier Judaic tradition must have influenced this exegetical reading. As Stade demonstrated long ago, the passage in Ezekiel 9. 4 should be interpreted in the context of other Old Testament passages that bear witness to the older Judaic concept of believers as property of their God (e.g. Isaiah 44. 5), and the religious practice of marking these believers with a sign on the forehead or hand (e.g. Genesis 4. 15 and Exodus 13. 9).³⁴ Hence, Franz Dölger, Erich Dinkler, and Jack Finegan believed this passage to refer to the ancient Judaic practice of administering a protective sign and mark of ownership (*Eigentum- und Schutzzeichen*) that denoted the divine Lord, Jahweh. The letter *taw* was inscribed in Palaeo-Hebrew epigraphic texts with two characters, + (earlier) and × (later), and these might have been placed on some Jewish ossuaries and funerary inscriptions with precisely the above purposes in mind. Thus, when the traditional Christian cross symbol

³¹ Justin Martyr, *Dialogue with Trypho*, 86 and 90, pp. 242 and 244; *The Epistle of Barnabas*, 12. 2–6, ed. and rev. Holmes, pp. 416–21. For more examples and references, see Sulzberger, 'Le symbole', pp. 254–66; Hurtado, 'Earliest Christian Graphic Symbols', p. 33.

³² For more details, see Hurtado, 'Earliest Christian Graphic Symbols', pp. 34–5.

³³ Tertullian, *Five Books Against Marcion*, 3. 22, pp. 340–1.

³⁴ Stade, 'Beiträge', pp. 299–318.

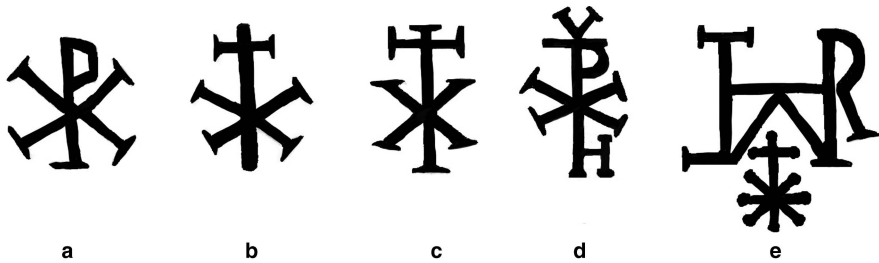


Fig. 1.2. Christian graphic signs on third-century gems, based on Spier, *Late Antique and Early Christian Gems*: a) the chi-rho (nos. 112–31); b–c) the chi-tau (nos. 134–5); d) a monogram comprising *X, P, H, T, Y* (no. 133); e) a combination of a tau with an eight-armed star (no. 137).

developed from the older Jewish tradition of *taw*, for early believers it similarly functioned as a protective mark of their Lord.³⁵ In some cases, Jewish converts to Christianity could have transferred this knowledge: in the early third century Origen related that one such convert had told him that the last letter of the Hebrew alphabet served as a symbol of the Cross.³⁶ For people familiar with the Hebrew epigraphic tradition, the x-form of that letter appeared identical to the Greek letter chi, the initial of Christ's name. Through such identification, chi did not only refer to Christ, but also to a protective mark bestowed by God.

The extralinguistic importance of the letters chi and tau can also be traced through the examination of graphic signs carved into early Christian gems produced in the Greek East in the second half of the third century. As mentioned above, the chi-rho appears on many of them as a graphic sign of Christ (Fig. 1.2a). But some of those gems present peculiar graphic signs composed of chi-tau, and certain examples include extra letters or lines (Fig. 1.2b–e).³⁷ Different combinations of these forms indicate that apart from the chi-rho, which is used quite consistently, other combinations of Greek letters were employed in a more improvised manner to refer to God, Christ, and his salvific Cross. Die-engravers apparently felt at liberty to choose different variants; they and their Christian customers seem to have known of no fixed form of Christian graphic symbol other than the chi-rho. Isopsephic considerations might have played a role in certain choices. The chi-tau combination (Fig. 1.2b–c), for instance, comprised characters that could have been viewed as symbols of the Cross, but simultaneously represented a total numeric value of 900 ($X=600$ and $T=300$) expressed with Sampi, which was known as an Episemon, a distinguishing mark in Greek, and thus as a number worthy of Jesus

³⁵ Dinkler, 'Zur Geschichte des Kreuzsymbols'; Dinkler, 'Kreuzzeichen und Kreuz'; Dölger, 'Beiträge zur Geschichte des Kreuzzeichens I–II'; Finegan, *The Archeology*, pp. 343–81. See also Black, 'The Chi-Rho Sign', pp. 324–6. For the wider tradition of religious branding in antiquity, see Jones, 'Stigma', p. 152.

³⁶ Origen, *Selecta in Ezechielem*, 9, cols 800–1; Stroumsa, *Hidden Wisdom*, pp. 123–4.

³⁷ Spier, *Late Antique and Early Christian Gems*, pp. 31–3, nos. 132–7.

Christ.³⁸ Furthermore, these graphic signs adorned gems mounted in finger-rings. It is unlikely that the latter were used as signet-rings, since the signs were carved as images in relief to be viewed directly on the rings. These features suggest that such signs might have been interpreted as both protective markers and indicators of religious ownership that 'sealed' the hands of their Christian wearers. In this sense, such graphic 'seals' also functioned as protective signs of identity for those who owned them.

It is noteworthy that the staurogram does not appear to have been on the list of options available to gem engravers. The isopsephic reading of the staurogram—that identified its letter tau with Jesus' cross—developed quite late, after the staurogram had moved from the world of scribal devices to that of free-standing symbols by the mid-fourth century, as testified by its presence in the Codex Sinaiticus.³⁹ Writing around that time, Ephraim the Syrian claimed the staurogram signified 'the cross is our help' or 'salvation is in the cross'. Ephraim connected the letter rho with the word 'help' (βοήθεια) because, when viewed as numbers, rho and the sum of the Greek letters composing 'help' had an identical numeric value (100).⁴⁰

A further feature of the tau-cross on third-century Christian gems from the Greek East is worthy of comment. On some specimens (Fig. 1.2b–c) the vertical post of the tau slightly continues above the vertical bar, resembling the Roman military standards that Tertullian and Minucius Felix commented upon in the early third century:

The camp religion of the Romans is all through a worship of the standards, a setting the standards above all gods. Well, as those images decking out the standards are ornaments of crosses. All those hangings of your standards and banners are robes of crosses.⁴¹

For your very standards, as well as your banners, and flags of your camp, what else are they but crosses gilded and adorned.⁴²

It is also possible, however, that the extended vertical bar was intended to represent the letter iota, and the above-mentioned chi-tau sign in fact also consists of the iota. By the early third century, this letter could refer to the name 'Jesus', as evinced by Clement of Alexandria's commentary on Luke, 16. 17:

Perhaps by the iota and tittle His righteousness cries, 'If ye come right unto Me, I will also come right to you; but if you are crooked, I also will come crooked, saith the Lord of hosts;' intimating that the ways of sinners intricate and crooked. For the way right and agreeable to nature which is intimated by the iota of Jesus, is his Goodness, which

³⁸ Finegan, *The Archeology*, pp. 232–3.

³⁹ A staurogram was used as a free-standing symbol after the text of the Book of Isaiah: London, BL, Add. Ms. 43725, fol. 68r. This free-standing graphic sign also appears in the Codex Vaticanus (Vatican City, BAV, Gr. 1209, p. 1382), produced in the second half of the fourth century. See Nordenfalk, *Die spätantiken Zierbuchstaben*, vol. 1, pp. 104–5, figs 23–4.

⁴⁰ Ephraim, *In sanctam Parasceven*, p. 477; Dölger, *Sol salutis*, p. 61; Hurtado, *The Earliest Christian Artifacts*, p. 149; and Vinzent, *Christ's Resurrection*, p. 23.

⁴¹ Tertullian, *Apology*, 16, p. 31.

⁴² Minucius Felix, *Octavius*, 29, p. 191.

constantly directs those who believe from hearing. 'There shall not, therefore, pass from the law one iota or one tittle,' neither from the right and good the mutual promises, nor from the crooked and unjust the punishment assigned to them.⁴³

As this passage reveals, by the early third century the iota already referred to Jesus Christ and his righteousness. From that time on, therefore, it could be used in combination with the chi to create another Christian sign referring to Christ, namely the iota-chi, a christogram that became more popular in the fifth and sixth centuries.

1.3. PROTECTIVE SEALS AND THE BRUCE CODEX

The well-established early Christian usage of graphic signs—as protective seals and marks of ownership referring to God—bears resemblance to the less orthodox religious employment of graphic devices that has traditionally been discussed with reference to Gnosticism—a category of dubious nature that has been incessantly debated and questioned in recent decades.⁴⁴ Furthermore, despite Irenaeus of Lyons' criticism of the so-called 'Gnostic' interpretations of numbers and letters in the late second century, the above analysis clearly shows that some orthodox Christian intellectuals accepted similar interpretations.⁴⁵ It was suggested some decades ago by Jean de Savignac that Christians borrowed the symbolic use of the staurogram from 'Gnostic' circles in Egypt.⁴⁶ This hypothesis has since been refuted,⁴⁷ but it does not negate the difficulty in distinguishing between Christian and so-called Gnostic usage of graphic signs: both 'orthodox' Christians and those who called themselves 'gnostics' (i.e. possessors of a special saving knowledge (γνῶσις)) enthusiastically used them as protective seals.⁴⁸

Produced in a late antique 'Gnostic' context, *The Book of the Great Initiatory Discourse*, also known as the *Books of Jeu*, illustrates this use of graphic signs, since it has been described as the only extant Gnostic document to contain graphic marginalia.⁴⁹ This work was originally written in Greek in late third- or fourth-century Egypt and later preserved in a Coptic translation in the Bruce Codex, currently held by the Bodleian Library.⁵⁰ In the *Book*, the resurrected Jesus Christ takes his disciples on a mystic journey towards heavenly spheres to approach the true invisible god Jeu (Ιέου). During this enlightening process, Jesus shares with his disciples esoteric knowledge that enables them to travel across the mystical world,

⁴³ Clement of Alexandria, *Fragments*, p. 578.

⁴⁴ For the criticism of this category as a twentieth-century scholarly construct to define religious traditions deviant from the perceived 'orthodox' Christianity, see Williams, *Rethinking Gnosticism*; King, *What is Gnosticism?*.

⁴⁵ Irenaeus, *Against Heresies*, 1. 14–16 and 2. 20–8, pp. 336–42 and 387–402. On this text, see Greer, 'The Dog and the Mushroom'. See also Bovon, 'Names and Numbers', p. 281.

⁴⁶ Savignac, 'Les papyrus'.

⁴⁷ Hurtado, *The Earliest Christian Artifacts*, pp. 143–6.

⁴⁸ For more details, see Norris, 'Gnostic Literature', p. 20.

⁴⁹ Finney, 'Did Gnostics Make Pictures?', p. 436.

⁵⁰ Oxford, Bodleian Library, Ms. Bruce 96. For details and references, see Pearson, *Gnosticism*, p. 74; and Cr  g  ur, *  dition critique*, pp. 160–70.

and leads them through sixty divine treasures hosting multiple types and emanations of Jeu, before they reach the final Treasury of the Light where Jeu resides.

The book is filled with graphic diagrams drawn to visualize both these treasures and the various graphic seals the disciples encounter on their mystic journey.⁵¹ Each treasure contains a specific type of Jeu, defined not only by a unique name but also by a special graphic character (Fig. 1.3, Jeu 5).⁵² Along with arcane passwords made of specific names and numbers, Jesus gives graphic signs to his disciples, who have to mark themselves with a particular seal in order to gain access to a given treasury. There, they receive the seal and the name of a corresponding Jeu-type.⁵³ The texts explaining how to enter each treasury differ little except for the provision of specific names, numbers, and graphic seals (Fig. 1.4a–e); Jesus' description of the fifty-fifth treasury provides a representative example of these passages:

Here now the placing of this treasury. When you come to this treasury, seal yourselves with this seal, which is here (Fig. 1.4a). This is its name, Zōksaezōz. Say it only once while this cipher 30515 is in your hand, and say this name, Ōōieēzamazā, three times, and the watchers and the ranks and the veils are drawn back, until you go to the place of their Father, (and he gives you his seal and his name), until you go (to the gate into his treasury). Now this is the placing of this treasury and all those within it.⁵⁴

In this context, the above-mentioned seals function as graphic marks of identity for specific divine powers, as symbolic keys to a specific treasury of the supernatural world, and as protective seals for believers.⁵⁵

It is not clear on what part of the body such seals were supposed to be drawn, but they were most likely intended for the hand or the forehead. The location of seals on the body (Fig. 1.5a–c) is more precisely described in the account of the triple baptism of Jesus' disciples—the water baptism, the baptism of fire, and the baptism of the Holy Spirit—which follows the mysteries of the treasures. In the final baptism:

Jesus sealed the disciples with this seal: (Fig. 1.5c). This is its name: Zakzōza. This is its interpretation: Thōzōnōz. . . and he baptised all his disciples with the baptism of the Holy Spirit. . . He sealed their foreheads with the seal of the seven virgins of the light, which made them numbered within the inheritance of the Kingdom of the Light. And the disciples rejoiced with very great joy because they had received the baptism of the Holy Spirit, and the seal which forgave sins and which purified iniquities and made them to be numbered among the inheritance of the Kingdom of the Light.⁵⁶

⁵¹ See *The Books of Jeu*, ed. Schmidt. The text has been considerably rearranged by Crégheur, *Édition critique*.

⁵² *The Books of Jeu*, ed. Schmidt, pp. 38–9, and Crégheur, *Édition critique*, pp. 312–13. For a discussion of this diagram, see Garipzanov, 'The Rise of Graphicacy', pp. 9–10.

⁵³ Crégheur, *Édition critique*, pp. 134–9.

⁵⁴ *The Books of Jeu*, ed. Schmidt, pp. 83–4. The text is slightly modified after Crégheur, *Édition critique*, pp. 203–4.

⁵⁵ On the similarity between the employment of these seals in this codex and the use of hieroglyphs in ancient Egyptian ritual practices, see Frankfurter, 'The Magic', pp. 208–9.

⁵⁶ *The Books of Jeu*, ed. Schmidt, pp. 112–14. The text is slightly modified after Crégheur, *Édition critique*, pp. 255–7.

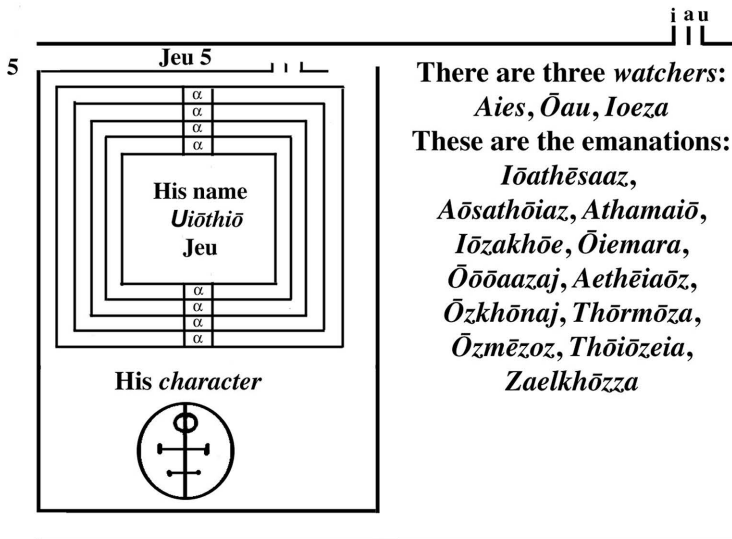
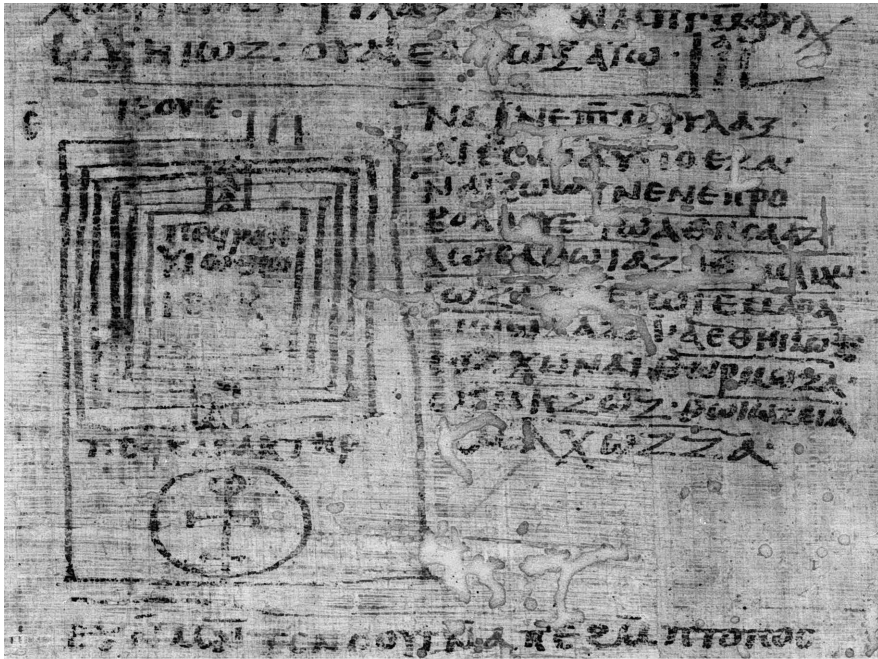


Fig. 1.3. Jeu 5 diagram in the Bruce Codex. Oxford, Bodleian Library, Bruce 96, p. 12 (above), and its graphic model (below).

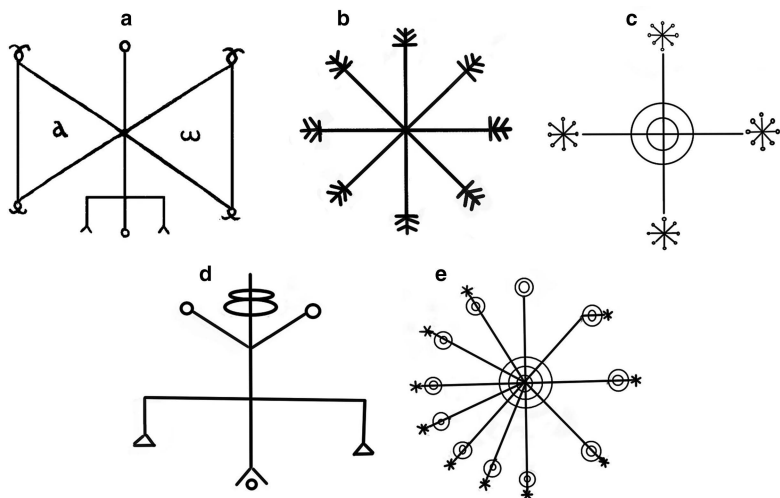


Fig. 1.4. Occult seals in the Bruce Codex, based on its edition in *The Books of Jeu*, ed. Schmidt: a) for the fifty-fifth treasury (p. 39); b) for the fifty-seventh treasury (p. 40); c) for the fifty-eighth treasury (p. 41); d) for the fifty-sixth treasury (p. 40); e) for the sixtieth treasury (p. 43).

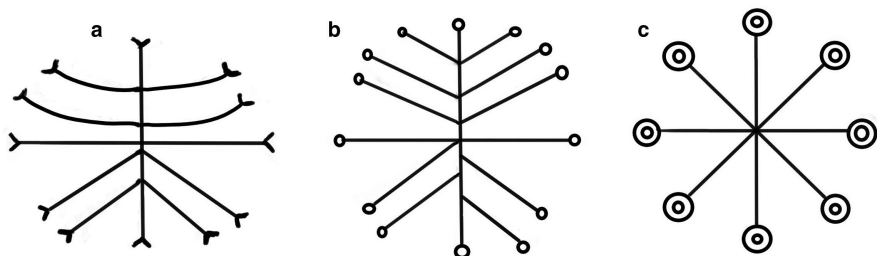


Fig. 1.5. Baptismal seals in the Bruce Codex, based on its edition in *The Books of Jeu*, ed. Schmidt: a) for baptism of water (p. 61); b) for baptism of fire (p. 63); c) for the baptism of the Holy Spirit (p. 65).

This passage indicates that graphic seals placed on foreheads played the same role among gnostics as they did among mainstream Christians and Jews: they served as protective signs of ownership referring to a divine Lord, and thus functioned as signs of divine authority. Moreover, as noted by Paul Finney, the practice of a religious leader initiating his ‘disciples in a rite that culminated in a magical sealing’ has close parallels in so-called magical papyri. As Finney comments, many seals in the Bruce Codex employ linear *hastae* common to late Roman and Byzantine monogrammatic ligatures, pointing to the influence of late Roman sigillography on ‘Gnostic’ seals.⁵⁷ In other words, despite their arcane nature, some graphic

⁵⁷ Finney, ‘Did Gnostics Make Pictures?’, pp. 437–8.

features of these seals were affected by common late antique sphragistic conventions. Furthermore, most of the functions that the 'Gnostic' seals fulfilled in the Bruce Codex are echoed in the use of early Christian signs, another indicator that contemporary Jews, mainstream Christians, various groups of gnostics, and pagans shared a common graphic culture.⁵⁸ In this culture, depending on specific religious and cultural contexts, certain graphic seals denoted protective signs, were viewed as an especially powerful means of communication with the transcendent sphere, and/or functioned as signs of authority referring to divine lords. Consequently, particular graphic symbols became suitable signs of identity for members of the religious communities that employed them.

The seal necessary to enter the fifty-fifth treasury (Fig. 1.4a) presents a particularly important case, principally because of its use of the first and last letters of the Greek alphabet, alpha and omega. These two letters became the Christian symbols of God (Revelations, 1. 8 and 21. 6) and of Jesus Christ's divine nature in particular (Revelations, 22. 13): 'I am the Alpha and the Omega, the first and the last, the beginning and the end.' In the late second century, Irenaeus of Lyons criticized the so-called Marcosian 'Gnostics' for their isopsephic interpretations, arguing they invested these two letters with excessive extralinguistic meanings. According to him, Marcus and his followers stated that Jesus was not only called alpha and omega, but also the dove since the numeric value of the alpha (1) and omega (800) is 801, which is identical to the numeric values of the Greek letters composing the word 'dove' (περιστέρα, $80 + 5 + 100 + 10 + 200 + 300 + 5 + 100 + 1 = 801$). Hence, the dove became a symbol of Christ.⁵⁹ Yet Clement of Alexandria had no problem referring to the first and last letters of the Greek alphabet as symbols of the Lord and God the Son,⁶⁰ and in the fourth century Christians began to use the very same letters by the sides of free-standing chi-rho and tau-rho to symbolize the divine nature of Jesus. Moreover, images of doves frequently flanked such christograms with the alpha and omega on Roman funerary *tabulae* carved in the second half of the fourth century, which clearly demonstrates that Christian symbolism eventually appropriated the very connection between the alpha and omega of Jesus and the dove that Irenaeus had criticized as heretical.⁶¹

The hoard found at Water Newton in Cambridgeshire in 1975, on the same location of the former Roman town of *Durobrivae*, reveals early examples of engraved chi-rho alongside the alpha and omega on silver objects that belonged to a practising Christian group, including silver liturgical vessels and votive plaques.

⁵⁸ This shared graphic culture must have survived through the Middle Ages, as hinted by the protective seals not dissimilar from those in the Bruce Codex that can be found in late Byzantine 'magical' treatises. See Gordon, 'Characteres', pp. 289–90.

⁵⁹ Irenaeus, *Against Heresies*, 1. 14. 6 and 15. 2, pp. 338–9.

⁶⁰ Clement of Alexandria, *The Miscellanies, or Stromata*, 4. 25, and 6. 16, pp. 438 and 513. See also *Der Traktat 'Vom Mysterium der Buchstaben'*, ed. Bandt, pp. 82–5.

⁶¹ Of course, by the early fifth century, doves were also identified with the Holy Spirit and the apostles, as Paulinus of Nola's description of the apse mosaic in the Basilica of St Felix in Nola (the so-called Basilica nova), probably c.403, makes it clear: *Epistolae*, 32. 10, p. 286. See also Murray, *Symbols*, p. 170; Dijkstra, *The Apostles*, p. 242.



Fig. 1.6. Votive plaques from Water Newton, Cambridgeshire. London, BrM. © The Trustees of the British Museum.

The hoard has been dated to the second half of the fourth century, although some objects found within may predate this period. Among the hoard's objects are nineteen votive leaves—one in gold and the rest in silver—similar in type to those offered as ex-votos in British pagan temples.⁶² Yet seven of these plaques uniquely feature the chi-rho sign, with all but one including the alpha and omega at its sides (Fig. 1.6). It has been suggested that the Christian community who used these silver objects took over a temple where such ex-votos had been customary, and adapted the practice to their own Christian rituals.⁶³ Yet this process of adaptation might equally have been triggered by the general context of competing religious practices in which early Christian communities operated, both in Britain and further afield. Returning to the chi-rho symbol struck on those leaves, with the accompanying alpha and omega, on the one hand they indicated the divine Lord to whom these specific ex-votos were offered—namely Christ—and on the other hand they functioned as his salvific seals, protecting members of that religious community in a world of competing apotropaic signs.

1.4. 'MAGICAL' CHARACTERS AND THEIR EARLY CHRISTIAN CRITICS

The plaques from Water Newton are broadly similar to the so-called curse tablets, known in Latin as *defixiones* and in Greek as *καταδέσμοι* (binding curses), which survive as 'inscribed pieces of lead, usually in the form of thin sheets, intended to bring supernatural power to bear against persons and animals'.⁶⁴ Such binding curses were also written or inscribed on papyrus, wax, limestone, gemstones, broken shards of pottery, and even ceramic bowls.⁶⁵ These curse tablets produced in the classical era sometimes included written formulas, and at a later period incorporated images. But in the late classical period, special mysterious signs known as *χαρακτήρες* (*characterēs*) in Greek and *charactera* in Latin appeared not only on curse tablets but also on bronze, silver, and gold lamellae, gemstones, public inscriptions, and papyri in various regions of the Roman world. These graphic signs represented powerful tools of supernatural protection or attack in late antiquity, when their use became especially popular, and *charactera* continued to appear in medieval and early modern manuscripts.⁶⁶

The function of these graphic signs remains somewhat unclear, as does the manner in which they came to represent the embodiment of great powers. John Gager has suggested a possible astrological origin, arguing that they symbolized

⁶² Painter, 'A Fourth-Century Christian Silver Treasure', has first dated the hoard to the late third / early fourth century. But the hoard's dating was changed to 350 or 303–4 in Kent and Painter, eds, *Wealth of the Roman World*, pp. 29–33, nos. 26–53, and, finally, to the second half of the fourth century in Painter, 'The Water Newton Silver'. See also Brown, *Through the Eye*, pp. 41–2.

⁶³ Thomas, *Christianity*, pp. 116–17; and Henig, *Religion*, pp. 111–13.

⁶⁴ Jordan, 'Defixiones', p. 206.

⁶⁵ Gager, *Curse Tablets*, p. 3; Collins, *Magic*, pp. 64–73.

⁶⁶ Collins, *Magic*, pp. 73–4; Grévin and Véronèse, 'Les "caractères" magiques'; Gordon, 'Characterēs'.

planetary powers that were associated with angels and archangels in the late Roman world.⁶⁷ At the same time, some 'magical' practitioners understood *charactera* not as graphic representations of those forces, but as independent divine agents.⁶⁸ Despite these occult signs having no phonology nor agreed semantic value,⁶⁹ some *characteres* resemble letters in the Greek alphabet and behave similarly, appearing in lines and clusters (Fig. 1.7). As in the case of the seals in the Bruce Codex, certain *charactera* also have linear *hastae*, with circles and nodes at their ends, connecting them to late Roman sigillography. Hence, David Frankfurter has suggested that they were used as a kind of 'sacred' writing, 'intelligible only to deities, angels, or the enlightened'.⁷⁰ He connects the origins of such signs to the decline of the traditional Egyptian priesthood in Roman Egypt, a development that markedly reduced the number of people able to write and read hieroglyphs, consequently turning them into undecipherable signs of supernatural power. *Characteres*, he argues, emerged in this changed cultural context in imitation of hieroglyphs, encouraged by a widespread Graeco-Roman fascination with these symbols.⁷¹ In addition to these factors, Richard Gordon has pointed to two other social developments conditioning the invention of *characteres* in Egypt: namely 'the assimilation of Greek culture into specifically religious contexts' and the appearance of Greek-speaking customers for 'magical' services.⁷² In short, modern research indicates that *characteres* originated in the multi-cultural environment of Roman Egypt dominated by Greek literacy, and this graphic phenomenon rapidly spread thereafter across the Graeco-Roman world.

Based on the evidence of 'magical' papyri, Gordon suggests that *characteres* were probably invented in the course of the second century AD. Yet other evidence indicates that their use reached the western parts of the Roman empire as early as the turn of the second century, which means that these graphic signs might have appeared in Egypt in the course of the first century AD. Thus, writing at the beginning of the second century AD, Tacitus probably thought of graphic signs visually similar to *characteres* in his description of the trial of M. Scribonius Libo Drusus, a member of the Roman elite accused of sorcery in 16 AD. Amongst other evidence, according to Tacitus, the prosecutor mentioned a paper listing the names of Caesars and senators, to which Libo had wilfully added some mysterious marks of harmful nature (*atrocis vel occultas notas*).⁷³

This interpretation of Tacitus' report is corroborated by the evidence of the earliest gold lamellae with transcendent *charactera* that were found at La Vedrenne in France and near the Roman fort at Segontium (Caernarvon) in Wales, both dated to the decades around the turn of the second century AD.⁷⁴ In the latter case, the find was evidently produced in a multi-cultural context, and thus represents a

⁶⁷ Gager, *Curse Tablets*, p. 10.

⁶⁸ Collins, *Magic*, pp. 74–8.

⁶⁹ Gordon, 'Characteres', pp. 255–63. Cf. *Sylloge gemmarum gnosticarum*, ed. Mastrocinque, vol. 1, pp. 90–8.

⁷⁰ Frankfurter, 'The Magic', p. 207.

⁷¹ Frankfurter, 'The Magic', pp. 205–11.

⁷² Gordon, 'Characteres', p. 257.

⁷³ *Annales*, 2. 30, ed. by Fisher, p. 61. For more details, see Ogden, *Magic*, no. 291, pp. 282–3.

⁷⁴ Kotansky, *Greek Magical Amulets*, nos. 2 and 10, pp. 3–12 and 44–5.

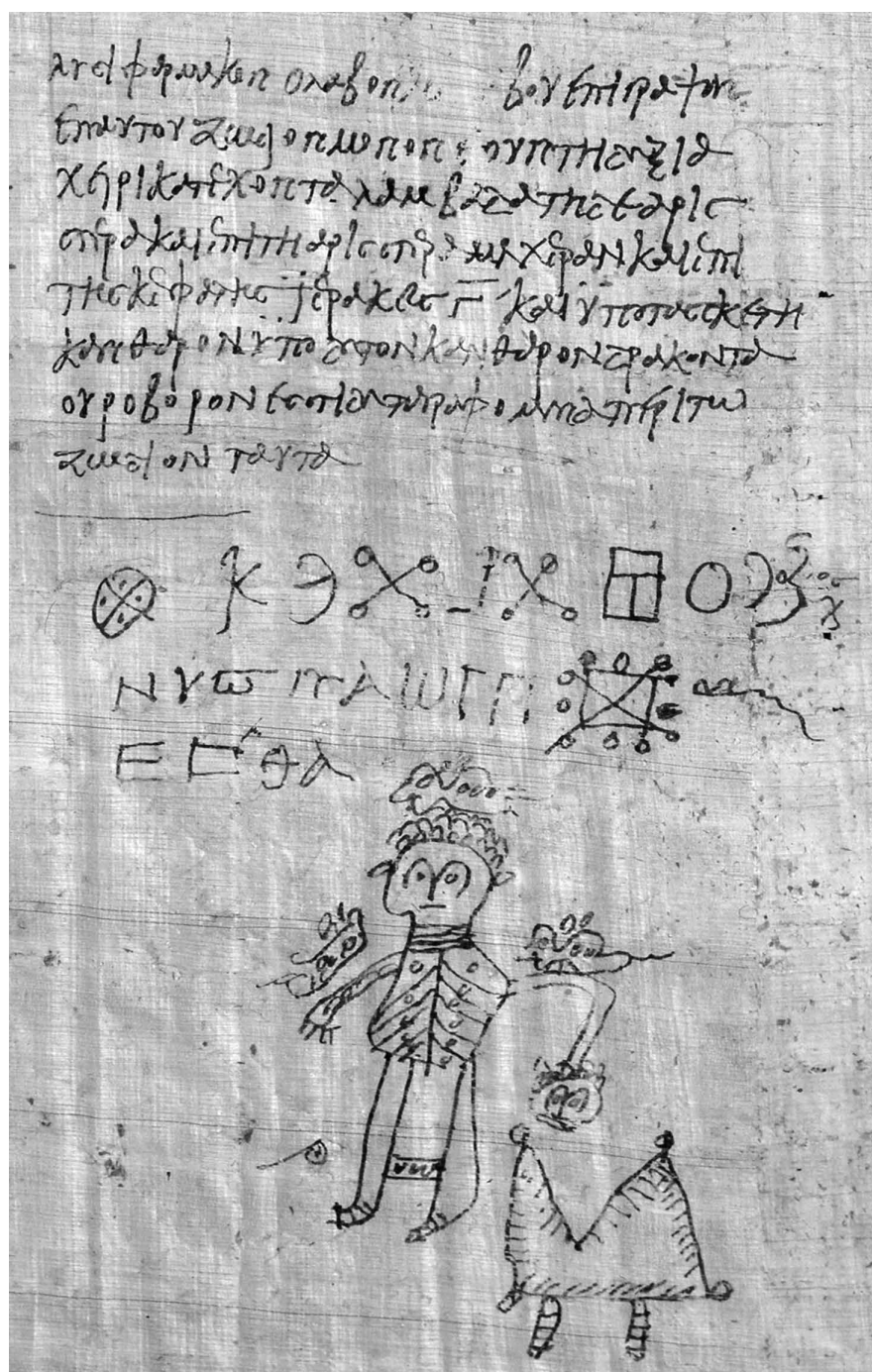


Fig. 1.7. Magical text from Egypt, fourth century, P.Oslo I 1, c.7. Courtesy of the University of Oslo Library Papyrus Collection.

particularly interesting case. The charm contains a Jewish liturgical formula written with Greek letters, accompanied with 'magical' characters of various forms, reflecting the fame that the Jewish 'magicians' acquired in those centuries.⁷⁵ One can postulate an equally cosmopolitan context for a later specimen from Britain, a fragment of a gold charm found at the site of a Romano-British temple near Woodeaton in Oxfordshire. This fragmentary lamella, which includes the name *Adonae* (typical of Judeo-Christian culture) in Latin, accompanied with letter-like *charactera*, might have been a votive offering made in the fourth or fifth centuries.⁷⁶ Such a find reveals parallels with the Christian votive plaques found at Water Newton, and the mysterious signs on the former and the chi-rhos on the latter perhaps functioned similarly, as graphic means of providing direct access to divine power. Understood in this way, both resemble certain 'Gnostic' seals so similar to esoteric *charactera* that they are sometimes even described as such in scholarship.⁷⁷

This functional similarity may appear paradoxical when one considers that, unlike Christian signs, occult *charactera* have traditionally been viewed as characteristic of ancient magic. Yet recent studies have emphasized that the perception of magic as a distinct phenomenon opposed to religion is a social construct.⁷⁸ It has also been shown that classical and late antique discourse used the notion of 'magic' as a means to secure 'a polemical devaluation and social exclusion of the people, rituals or beliefs in question'.⁷⁹ From this perspective, it is unsurprising that early Christian intellectuals labelled the occult *charactera* as magical signs.

Augustine played an important role in the creation of the Christian discourse of 'pagan magic' as the work of the Devil and his forces,⁸⁰ and magical characters featured in accounts of pagan deviations in his *De doctrina Christiana*, as well as in his sermons. Among a list of superstitious practices, Augustine mentioned certain marks called *charactera* (*notis quos characteres vocant*) that people, including Christians in North Africa, used as magical remedies⁸¹ or apotropaic devices.⁸² In spite of such criticism, echoed by prominent Christian intellectuals in the sixth and seventh centuries, the use of *charactera* in various 'deviant' practices seems to have blossomed in the late antique world. Thus, Caesarius preached to his Christian audience in Merovingian Arles against the use of devilish characters (*diabolicos characteres*) on apotropaic and healing devices, and in Visigothic Spain Isidore of Seville repeated Augustine's and Caesarius' diatribes against the employment of amulets with magical characters.⁸³ Yet these condemnations do not seem to have deterred their everyday use by Christians, and in the early sixth-century Caesarius

⁷⁵ Dickie, *Magic*, pp. 287–93.

⁷⁶ Kotansky, *Greek Magical Amulets*, no. 3, pp. 13–15.

⁷⁷ Kotansky, 'Amulets', p. 70.

⁷⁸ Otto, 'Towards Historicizing "Magic"'; Bremmer, 'Preface', pp. 10–11; and Sfameni, 'Magic', pp. 437–40.

⁷⁹ Otto, 'Towards Historicizing "Magic"', p. 326.

⁸⁰ Otto, 'Towards Historicizing "Magic"', pp. 329–30.

⁸¹ Augustine, *De doctrina Christiana*, 2.74 and 2.111, ed. and trans. Green, pp. 90–3 and 108–9.

⁸² '...et quando illi caput dolet, characteres sibi ad collum ligat, et qui non vult mori, ad collum sibi ligat', Augustine, *Sermones*, 260D, ed. Morin, p. 500.

⁸³ Isidore, *Etymologies*, 8.9.30, ed. Barney et al., p. 183; Caesarius of Arles, *Sermons*, 1.12, 13.5, 184.3, and 204.3, ed. Mueller, vol. 1, pp. 13 and 78; vol. 2, p. 481; vol. 3, p. 74. For more details and references, see Dickie, *Magic*, pp. 280, 304, and 309.

of Arles complained that not only lay people but also some members of the Christian clergy in Gaul actively involved themselves in such deviant practices.

Often enough they receive charms even from priests and the religious, who, however, are not really religious and clerics but the Devil's helpers. See, brethren, how I plead with you not to consent to accept these wicked objects, even if they are offered by clerics.⁸⁴

The proliferation of 'magical' characters was even more evident in the Roman East and early Byzantium, where they were inscribed on amulets, and carved onto public buildings such as the Miletus theatre, which had an apotropaic inscription with occult signs carved onto an external wall during late antiquity.⁸⁵ A popular occult sign of an eight-armed star with small circles at the end of its arms—the latter feature explaining another name used by modern scholars for such *charactera*, namely *signes pometés*⁸⁶—can be found in late antique floor mosaics, for example, on pavements in a palatial building at Apamea in Syria dated to the early fifth century and in the sixth-century church of Beit Méry in Lebanon.⁸⁷ The unique floor design of that church combined this occult character with apotropaic signs more common for late antique church floor mosaics such as Solomon's knots, swastikas, rings, and crosses of different types. A similar practice can be traced in late antique private houses, where magical signs and apotropaic inscriptions appeared on pavement mosaics in doorways or entrance areas.⁸⁸

The popularity of such *charactera* is also evinced by their presence in a number of late antique Egyptian papyrus manuscripts in Greek, Coptic, and Aramaic, some of which include practical manuals on their usage.⁸⁹ A number of these papyri, especially Coptic ones, certainly emanated from Christian circles and were the work of monks and priests combining elaborate sets of *caractères* with invocations of Jesus, Maria, angels, and demonic entities.⁹⁰ An early example of such texts is a fourth-century papyrus sheet from a 'magical' handbook in Greek (P. Berol. 17202), which starts with a Christian liturgical exorcism focusing on Jesus' miracles, and ends with the list of *charactera*.⁹¹ A later Coptic example is the so-called *Magical Book of Mary and the Angels* (P. Heid. Inv. Kopt. 685), a text that combines a prayer to the Virgin Mary with *caractères* framing the figure of Jesus in an ornamental fashion.⁹²

Jeffrey Spier has suggested that there must have been a 'magical' book of a similar nature in early Byzantium, which the producers of apotropaic Christian amulets of Syrian-Palestinian origin used as a manual in the early sixth century. On one such

⁸⁴ Caesarius of Arles, *Sermons*, 50.1, ed. Mueller, vol. 1, p. 254. For more textual examples of Christian clerics and bishops practising 'magic', see Dickie, *Magic*, pp. 271–81.

⁸⁵ Cline, 'Archangels, Magical Amulets'.

⁸⁶ Derchain, 'Intailles magiques', p. 193; Gordon, 'Caractères', p. 257, note 13.

⁸⁷ For more details and references, see Maguire, 'Magic'.

⁸⁸ Scheibelreiter-Gail, 'Inscriptions', pp. 148–50.

⁸⁹ *The Greek Magical Papyri in Translation*, ed. Betz; Dzwiza, *Schriftverwendung*; Gordon, 'Caractères', p. 272.

⁹⁰ Gordon, 'Caractères', pp. 272–9.

⁹¹ Brashear and Kotansky, 'A New Magical Formulary'.

⁹² Meyer, *The Magical Book of Mary and the Angels*; Gordon, 'Caractères', pp. 278–80.



Fig. 1.8. Fifth- or sixth-century bronze amulet, Ann Arbor, University of Michigan, Kelsey Museum of Archaeology, acc. no. 26119.

specimen, occult *charactera* accompanied an image of King Solomon, who later became a popular figure in medieval occult practices.⁹³ This conflation of Christian motifs with ‘magical’ characters is also evident on the reverse of a bronze amulet medallion (Fig. 1.8b) in the Kelsey Museum of Archaeology in Ann Arbor, which is dated to the fifth or sixth century and presents the orthodox images in the upper field of the enthroned Christ and the four beasts of the Book of Revelations with a Greek liturgical phrase from the *Sanctus* (originally from Isaiah 6.3)—‘Holy, Holy,

⁹³ Spier, ‘An Antique Magical Book’, no. 6.

Holy, Lord God of Sabaoth’—followed by six occult *charactères* taking the central position and a blend of ‘magical’ symbols in the lower field.⁹⁴ Their location and size indicates that the medallion’s creator intended these esoteric characters to occupy equal prominence with the Christian symbols and invocation, to ensure the efficacious nature of the amulet, which, according to a circular inscription near the reverse’s rim, was a ‘seal of the living God’, guarding its wearer from all evil.⁹⁵ Such an amulet was defined in Greek as *φυλακτήριον* (phylactery), rendered in Latin as *phylacterium*. The same term was used to refer to textual amulets and Greek and Coptic magical papyri on the one hand and portable Christian reliquaries and pectoral crosses on the other⁹⁶—thus highlighting unclear borders between acceptable and deviant apotropaic practices.⁹⁷

1.5. APOTROPAIC GRAPHIC DEVICES AS A SYMPTOMATIC FEATURE OF LATE ANTIQUITY

The overview in the preceding sections demonstrates that early Christian graphic signs originated in the cosmopolitan Roman empire, where diverse cultural traditions shaped their early development. Firstly, their formal features derived from Hellenistic literate culture, which had used the tau-rho and the chi-rho as abbreviations. Early Christian manuscript culture incorporated the tau-rho in this capacity, whence it developed into a particular visual expression of Christian piety. In the course of the second and third centuries, these signs became graphic symbols referring to Jesus Christ and the Crucifixion. As such, the chi-rho began to represent free-standing Christian symbols in various media, as did other signs at a later stage. Secondly, under the influence of the classical practice of isopsephy, as well as earlier Judaic tradition, some letters employed in early Christian graphic devices acquired extralinguistic conceptual meanings—in some cases related to the nature of the divine—which second- and third-century Christian authors commented upon. Thirdly, the earlier Judaic practice of using graphic devices of that kind as protective seals and marks of ownership referring to the divine Lord clearly influenced the early use of Christian graphic signs as solitary symbols. In other words, the Lord marked out his flock for salvation with such signs, and bearing this mark of the Lord’s ownership carried a promise of divine protection. In this sense, these signs functioned with reference to divine authority. After all, authority is often invested with some apotropaic qualities. In this functional usage, early Christian graphic symbols differed little from contemporaneous religious seals traditionally

⁹⁴ Bonner, *Studies*, no. 324, p. 307. Exactly the same phrase in Latin (‘sanctus, sanctus, sanctus, dominus deus [sabaoth]’) can be found in the mid-thirteenth-century Canterbury Amulet: Canterbury Cathedral Library, Add. Ms. 23, col. 8, transcribed by Skemer, *Binding Words*, pp. 285–304, at p. 300.

⁹⁵ For a detailed discussion of this amulet and relevant references, see Dauterman Maguire, Maguire, and Duncan-Flowers, *Art and Holy Powers*, pp. 214–15.

⁹⁶ For more details and references, see Skemer, *Binding Words*, pp. 10–12.

⁹⁷ For the shared magical culture of late antiquity, see Boustani and Sanzo, ‘Christian Magicians’.

labelled as 'Gnostic'. Finally, in their protective function, Christian graphic symbols were comparable to occult graphic characters that spread across the Roman world from around the turn of the second century AD onwards. Clandestine *charactera*, esoteric seals, and more widely accepted Christian signs fulfilled a more or less identical role for different communities: the graphic means to provide access to supernatural or divine powers. The distinction between acceptable and deviant practices in the use of these signs remains somewhat obscure, especially in the third and fourth centuries, and even in the fifth, sixth, and seventh centuries, many Christians did not consider the use of powerful *charactera* in their communication with the supernatural world to be problematic, despite repeated criticism of this practice made by some late antique church leaders.

This situation merely reflected the fact that a predilection for graphic devices with perceived transcendent powers had become a general phenomenon in the Imperial period and especially in late antiquity, and that this trend affected both non-Christian and Christian cultures. Graphic traditions from the Eastern Mediterranean obviously influenced this development, but it also seems symptomatic of a wider societal transformation. The changing world of late antiquity, where traditional cultural norms and practices lost their unquestionable grasp over local communities, and where new cosmopolitan strands of religious worship eroded localized polytheistic cults, created a public demand for new ways to control a highly volatile social environment, as well as unpredictable supernatural powers, and required more direct means to interact with transcendent forces in that process. As Peter Brown has shown, public enthusiasm for more direct access to the divine produced the figure of a holy man as a distinctive new feature of the late antique social landscape.⁹⁸ The spread of graphic signs with perceived supernatural properties represents another societal response to the very same need.

In this social context of competing religious cultures and practices,⁹⁹ Christians also needed effective graphic signs that could provide them recourse to supernatural powers for protection and success. Initially the staurogram and christograms furnished them with such powerful graphic tools, combining the graphic structure of occult *charactera* with letters referring to Christ or the Crucifixion. Early hagiography is filled with stories of saints competing with 'magicians' in the art of wonder-making, and in the same vein, early Christian graphic signs competed with 'magical' graphic devices in the late antique sociocultural landscape.

But the use or rejection of graphic symbols also represented a powerful means of establishing and maintaining internal group boundaries and coherent identities. This was especially important for second- and third-century Christians, for whom the need to distinguish themselves from the Jews, and from other religious groups worshipping Jesus, was an urgent and serious matter. The adoption of the chi-rho, tau-rho, and other Christian signs allowed early Christian leaders to demarcate boundaries for their nascent communities by means of early graphicacy. These

⁹⁸ Brown, 'The Rise'; with a slight modification in Brown, *Authority*, pp. 55–78.

⁹⁹ For an emphasis on Christianity as just one of the Eastern cults spreading across the late Roman empire, see e.g. Pettipiece, 'From Cybele'.

symbols not only differed from contemporary religious and occult signs but also carried cryptic messages on the nature of the Christian God. Only a well-read person could fully decode those messages, with their references to the Holy Scripture and the exegetical comments of the apostolic fathers. The majority of Christians, meanwhile, saw these signs as graphic promises of salvation and as visual manifestations of religious identity within particular groups and, from the fourth century, of the triumphant Christian empire propagating the Gospel of the Heavenly King.

2

Christograms as Signs of Authority in the Late Roman Empire

In the course of the fourth century, Christian graphic signs became a visible feature of late Roman society, and their functions changed dramatically. From being the graphic signs of a small and suppressed religious minority at the beginning of that century—signs that many contemporaries might not have seen any different from esoteric seals or occult characters—they developed into the triumphant symbols of the Christian empire, and new signs of authority for Roman emperors and Christian bishops. In this new function, they began to feature at imperial courts, in episcopal basilicas, and on various luxury objects. This transformation did not happen overnight, but instead mirrored the gradual process of conversion in the late Roman empire, with the reign of Constantine I (306–37) playing a pivotal role.¹

2.1. LACTANTIUS AND CONSTANTINE I'S VICTORIOUS SIGN IN 312

In 311, just before his death, Emperor Galerius issued an edict in Nicomedia that ended the Great Persecutions of Christians in the Roman empire, initiated by Diocletian in 303. Two years later, Licinius and Constantine promulgated a law (later known as the Edict of Milan) that promised Christians even more favourable treatment.² The year 313 thus marked the transformation of Christians in the empire from a persecuted minority to an officially recognized religious community that received imperial support; churches were restored and confiscated ecclesiastical properties returned. Shortly after Galerius' edict, Constantine embarked on a southbound military offensive against Maxentius' forces in Italy, and in the autumn of 312 reached Rome for the ultimate clash with his imperial adversary. As the Christian rhetorician Lactantius wanted his readers to believe a few years after those dramatic events,³ Constantine had a

¹ For overviews of Constantine's reign, see Cameron, 'Chapter 4. The Reign of Constantine', pp. 90–109; and Barnes, *Constantine*.

² For more details and references, see Barnes, *Constantine*, pp. 93–7; Lenski, 'The Significance'.

³ On the date of this work and its audience, see Barnes, 'Lactantius'; Van Dam, *Remembering Constantine*, pp. 112–24.

vision before this imminent battle, which entered historical records as the Battle of the Milvian Bridge (28 October 312).

Constantine was advised in a dream to mark the celestial sign of God on the shields [of his soldiers] and so to proceed to battle. He did as he was commanded, and by means of a letter X crossed through, with the upper tip [of the crossing line] bent around (*transversa X littera, summo capite circumflexo*), he marked Christ on their shields. Armed with this sign, the army took up its weapons.⁴

This tale represents the earliest textual reference to a Roman emperor appropriating a Christian graphic sign to use as an apotropaic device for both himself and his army, and Lactantius intended the ensuing description of Constantine's victory over Maxentius to confirm the intercessory efficacy of that symbol to his readers. This passage has been the subject of a protracted academic debate, currently dominated by two radically different standpoints. The traditional approach has been to treat Lactantius' description as an eye-witness account of an actual event, that needs either proper interpretation or correction to reveal accurately what sign Constantine saw in his dream and then placed on the shields of his soldiers.

Consequently, many scholars have suggested that Lactantius' problematic passage should be interpreted as referring to the chi-rho, something like in the passage above.⁵ Such a reading would then be corroborated by the presence of the chi-rho on monuments and artefacts dated to the Constantinian period.⁶ Yet the precise wording that the Christian writer selected to describe the graphic symbol in question is rather awkward if he referred to the chi-rho, which was employed as a free-standing symbol in the Roman East from as early as the second half of the third century; that sign might have been familiar to Lactantius after his earlier stay in Nikomedia, as well as to some of his Latin readers. In response to such a linguistic objection, it has been suggested that the passage may be textually corrupt, which is not impossible when one considers that Lactantius' text has survived only in a single manuscript. Consequently, the interpolation of a letter I into the passage describing Constantine's sign has been proposed to make the latter compatible with the chi-rho: 'by means of an X crossed through by a letter I' (*transversa X littera I*).⁷

Other scholars have read Lactantius' passage as a reference to the tau-rho/staurogram—also known as the monogrammatic cross—a sign the use of which as a solitary symbol in the Latin West remains dubious before Constantine's reign.⁸ The graphic structure of this free-standing symbol was therefore unknown to

⁴ 'Commonitus est in quiete Constantinus, ut caeleste signum dei notaret in scutis atque ita proelium committeret. Fecit ut jussus est, et transversa X littera, summo capite circumflexo, Christum in scutis notat. Quo signo armatus exercitus capit ferrum', Lactantius, *De mortibus persecutorum*, 44. 5–6, pp. 200–2.

⁵ Sulzberger, 'Le symbole', pp. 401–9; Marrou, 'Autour', pp. 403–14. For recent detailed linguistic discussions of this passage and the word '*transversa*' in particular, as well as relevant literature, see Heck, 'Constantin', pp. 124–7; and Bardill, *Constantine*, p. 161, notes 23 and 25.

⁶ Odahl, 'The Celestial Sign'.

⁷ Sulzberger, 'La Symbole', pp. 406–7. For relevant literature and a critical discussion of that emendation originally suggested by Henri Grégoire, see Bardill, *Constantine*, pp. 161–2.

⁸ For the discussion of the staurograms on the plaque of Beratius Nikitoras, see Chapter 1.

Lactantius' Latin readers, and his description of the sign, with its reference to the initial of Christ's name in Greek, would have made its symbolic meaning more apparent to his readers: 'by means of a letter X turned sideways, with the top of its head bent around, he marked Christ on their shields.'⁹ In that case, the Christian apologist would have perceived that sign to be a christogram, and Lactantius may have been familiar with a passage in Justin Martyr's second-century *First Apology*, which mentioned an alleged reference in Plato's *Timaeus* to Christ being placed crosswise on the world. Justin argued that the Greek philosopher had borrowed this idea from Numbers, 21, 8–9, in which Moses made the sign of a cross using a brass serpent. Plato, meanwhile, wrote of the soul of the universe being placed on the latter as a *χίασμα*, in the form of the letter chi.¹⁰ Thus Justin Martyr thought of the letter X turned sideways, as if it were an equal-armed cross, and Lactantius could have imagined the main frame of Constantine's sign in the same way.

In his recent study, Jonathan Bardill has attempted to support the latter reading using visual evidence attributed to the Constantinian period. Most of that evidence lacks precise dating, and its attribution to the period before or soon after the Battle of the Milvian Bridge remains inconclusive. Among other examples, Bardill refers to a staurogram identified on frescoes in the so-called *domus Faustae*, a high-status and possibly imperial residence in the vicinity of the Lateran basilica, deeming it to be crucial material evidence that the free-standing tau-rho might have been employed in Constantinian Rome soon after the victorious battle of 312. According to the reconstruction of the frescoes and related inscriptions made by Valnea Santa Maria Scrinari, the staurogram should probably be linked to the mural inscription 'In this sign is the victory of the Father' (*In signo hoc est patris victoria*), and was located close to another inscription that mentioned the fourth consulship of Licinius of 315. Because of this spatial proximity, Bardill dates that sign to 315.¹¹

Yet that graphic evidence is quite problematic. Firstly, Scrinari's reconstruction of these inscriptions has been contested, as has her interpretation of the whole complex as the house of Constantine's wife, Fausta.¹² Furthermore, the connection made between the inscription mentioning the fourth consulship of Licinius and the staurogram in a separate line is highly hypothetical. The fresco panels name all the members of Constantine's family, from his father, Constantius Chlorus, to his sons—including Constans, with a simple chi-rho placed between the two words of his title *imperator Romanorum* (337–50). The frescoes could therefore have been created or modified in the second quarter of the fourth century, and the staurogram may also have been drawn during that period. Moreover, the inscription accompanying the tau-rho echoes the description of Constantine's sign in Eusebius' *Life of Constantine*, written after the emperor's death in 337. It was therefore probably

⁹ For further details, see Aland, 'Bemerkungen', pp. 173–9, at p. 176; Black, 'The Chi-Rho Sign', pp. 320–2; Bardill, *Constantine*, pp. 161–2.

¹⁰ Justin Martyr, *The First Apology*, 55, p. 183, note 2. For a detailed discussion of this passage and its broader philosophical context, see Heid, *Kreuz*, pp. 19–29.

¹¹ For more details and references, see Scrinari, *Il Laterano imperiale*, pp. 162–73, figs 126–70, especially table E and fig. 133; Bardill, *Constantine*, pp. 164–6.

¹² See especially Liverani, 'Note'.

painted on the wall along with the sign sometime in the 340s or perhaps even later. That the tau-rho was depicted with an alpha and omega below its vertical bar also supports a later date, since the extant corpus of material evidence suggests that the addition of an alpha and omega to chi-rho and tau-rho signs—as graphic emphasis on the divine nature of Christ—took place after the reign of Constantine.¹³

Peter Weiss has instead suggested that the appropriation of Constantine's victorious sign might have been inspired after a possible sighting by the emperor and his soldiers whilst on campaign in Gaul of a solar halo phenomenon in the form of a 'light-cross', arguing that Constantine might have originally interpreted this sighting as a symbolic manifestation of Sol, the divine Sun. Before the battle of the Milvian Bridge in 312, according to Weiss and those who support his view, this earlier vision could have been re-interpreted as pointing to the triumphant symbol of Christ, and that 'miraculous' sign in the sky above the sun was later described by Eusebius of Caesarea as 'a cross-shaped trophy formed from light, and a text attached to it which said, "By this conquer"'.¹⁴ Such Christian appropriation of a pagan symbol could happen easily: the *dies natalis* ('birthday') of Sol Invictus coincided with Christmas, and both divinities were associated with heaven and light.¹⁵ Because of such similarities, in 312 the shape of the solar halo could have been reinterpreted as revealing an apotropaic sign of Christ, and a slightly modified variant of a solar symbol (a six- or eight-pointed star) was allegedly placed on the shields of Constantine's soldiers, and from there caught Lactantius' attention.

The second, more recent approach to Lactantius' description of the triumphant sign understands it to be a literary construct; a rhetorical device intended to highlight divine support for Constantine's take-over of Rome. At the time of the battle, Lactantius was not in Rome but Trier, and wrote an account based on the various stories of people who had participated in the Battle of the Milvian Bridge; in his triumphalist mode he was capable of providing a Christian re-interpretation for a sign that he had either seen or heard about, which might have had an entirely different original context and meaning.¹⁶ After all, stories of revelatory dreams or visions experienced by historical figures before crucial battles were common in classical historiography. Lactantius' imagination might have been triggered, for instance, by a distinctive emblem on the shields of a particular military unit that he had seen in Trier.¹⁷ It is also remarkable that the description of the Battle of the Milvian Bridge in all surviving versions of Eusebius' *Ecclesiastical History* (9, 2–8)—written in the East between c.313 and the mid-320s and filled with biblical similes

¹³ Cecchelli, *Il trionfo*, pp. 95 and 97. Cf. Bardill, *Constantine*, p. 164, note 41.

¹⁴ Eusebius, *The Life of Constantine*, 1. 28. 2, p. 81, with comments at pp. 204–8 pointing to biblical parallels. On the eschatological interpretation of this vision, see Nicholson, 'Constantine's Vision'.

¹⁵ Weiss, 'The Vision'; Drake, 'Solar Power'; Long, 'How to Read a Halo'; Girardet, *Der Kaiser*, pp. 30–52; Hollard and López Sánchez, *Le Chrisme*, pp. 37–67; Lenski, *Constantine*, pp. 69–70. For criticism of Weiss's interpretation, see Weber, *Kaiser*, p. 281; Harris, 'Constantine's Dream'. Cf. also Bardill, *Constantine*, pp. 159–60, 168–74, and 326–31, who argues that Eusebius' description of this vision was a later elaboration of St Paul's vision on the way to Damascus (Acts, 26. 13).

¹⁶ For more details and references, see Bleicken, *Constantin*, pp. 30–3; Van Dam, *Remembering Constantine*, pp. 112–19.

¹⁷ Harris, 'Constantine's Dream', pp. 492–3.

with the aim of emphasizing divine support for Constantine—does not include any mention of a miraculous sign being revealed to Constantine, or its subsequent appropriation by the emperor.¹⁸

Regardless of the original appearance of Constantine's victorious sign, if indeed it existed at all, the sign clearly played a less significant role for the emperor and his entourage in the first years after the defeat of Maxentius than Lactantius wanted his readers to believe. The chi-rho was never propagated as a triumphant symbol of Constantine's success on his coinage in the second decade of the fourth century, while the earliest coin issue featuring a tau-rho took the form of *solidi* struck far in the East, in Antioch in 336/7. But even at such a late date that sign was used as a simple mintmark.¹⁹ In the 320s and 330s, when the Christian connotations of the Battle of the Milvian Bridge acquired a more prominent symbolic role for Constantinian emperors, his triumphant sign became firmly linked to the chi-rho in the public's mythologized perception of the emperor. Lactantius' work must have been influential in the creation of that myth. As if echoing Lactantius' text, a chi-rho was chosen to be one of the symbols that appeared on the shield of Constantine's son Crispus on the obverse of a series of copper coins issued c.322–3 in Trier, the location of Crispus' imperial residence.²⁰ It is known that, after moving to Constantine's headquarters in Trier, Lactantius instructed Crispus in Latin, suggesting that the text of *De mortibus persecutorum* might have been known at that court and by local mint masters in particular. The teacher's story could thus have influenced that particular numismatic image of his pupil.

2.2. EUSEBIUS AND THE APPROPRIATION OF THE CHI-RHO AS AN IMPERIAL TRIUMPHANT SYMBOL IN THE 320–40s

When Eusebius described the imperial celestial sign in his *Life of Constantine* in the late 330s, his perception was clearly shaped by the appearance of the imperial *labarum* as well as by stories explaining its importance and meaning that Constantine had told to Eastern bishops in the final years of his reign. As a result of these conflated memories and Eusebius' own agenda,²¹ his eye-witness account of that trophy creates a false impression that the apotropaic standard faithfully represented the emperor's miraculous sign in 312:

A tall poll plated with gold had a transverse bar forming the shape of the cross. Up at the extreme top a wreath woven of precious stones and gold had been fastened. On it two letters, intimating by its first characters the name 'Christ', formed the monogram of the Savior's title, *rho* being intersected in the middle by *chi*. These letters the

¹⁸ Harris, 'Constantine's Dream', p. 491; and Van Dam, *Remembering Constantine*, pp. 85–95.

¹⁹ RIC, vol. 7, pp. 61–4, 666, and 695.

²⁰ RIC, vol. 7, p. 197, no. 372; Odahl, 'The Celestial Sign', p. 19; Abdy and Dowler, *Coins*, p. 88, fig. 6; Abdy, 'From Page', p. 175.

²¹ This point is discussed in detail by Van Dam, *Remembering Constantine*, pp. 61–80.

Emperor also used to wear on his helmet in later times. From the transverse bar, which was bisected by the pole, hung suspended a cloth, an imperial tapestry covered with a pattern of precious stones fastened together. . . . But the upright staff, which extended upwards a long way from the lower end, below the trophy of the cross and near the top of the tapestry delineated, carried the golden head-and-shoulders portraits of the Godbeloved Emperor, and likewise of his children. This saving sign was always used by the Emperor for protection against every opposing and hostile force, and he commanded replicas of it to lead all his armies.²²

As Eusebius' description makes clear, Constantine's *labarum* was a T-shaped standard surmounted with a wreath, which had a chi-rho within.²³ Yet, as emphasized by Bardill, this *labarum* might originally have been limited to a simple T-shaped standard, as presented on silver coin-medallions issued in Ticinum in 315 (Fig. 2.1), and only received additional elements in the following years. The portrait of the emperor and his sons, for example, could only have been added after Crispus and Constantine Junior had become Caesars in 317. The precious wreath with the



Fig. 2.1. Obverse of Constantine I's silver coin-medallion (Ticinum, 315). The State Hermitage Museum, St Petersburg, inv. no. OH-A-ДР-15266.

²² Eusebius, *The Life of Constantine*, 1. 31, pp. 81–2, with comments at pp. 210–12.

²³ Black, 'The Chi-Rho Sign', pp. 321–3. Bardill argues that the porphyry sarcophagus in the atrium of Hagia Irena presents the image of that standard and was originally made for Constantine I, *Constantine*, pp. 187–94.

chi-rho within must have been added in the second half of Constantine's reign, the result of the later re-interpretation of Constantine's reputed visions in 310 and 312. Furthermore, this later re-visioning of earlier events can be accounted for by the fact that the first numismatic depictions of the triumphant standard with a chi-rho, as described by Eusebius, only appeared on Roman coinage from 326 onwards.²⁴ Eusebius' text, alongside his description of the *labarum*, thus reflected a modified remembrance of the Battle of the Milvian Bridge in the late 320s and 330s, when the chi-rho had become the triumphant graphic sign of Christ par excellence. After Constantine appropriated the symbol in the second half of his reign, this modification was a simple one to make. As Eusebius claimed, Constantine personally placed that sign on his helmet soon after the battle, and the emperor is indeed shown wearing a helmet with an apotropaic chi-rho on its crest on the above-mentioned coin-medallions from Ticinum (Fig. 2.1).²⁵ Furthermore, when western imperial mints placed different graphic symbols on the helmet of Constantine's profile bust on his copper coins produced in c.318–20, one of the issuers in Siscia chose a chi-rho for this precise purpose.²⁶

The public perception in the 320s of the chi-rho as Constantine's triumphant sign was hardly accidental, and must have been influenced by the growing visibility of the chi-rho in the Roman world after the battle of the Milvian Bridge. This sign accompanied imperial inscriptions featuring Emperor Constantine's name on two Roman milestones in North Africa dated to the first four months of 313, one in Mauretania Caesariensis and the other in Numidia (Djémila).²⁷ The same sign appears on another Roman milestone at Djémila carved between 319 or 324, and the practice of marking milestones with chi-rhos can be attested in that region in the years after 326.²⁸ The chi-rho was familiar to contemporary Christians in Italy too, evinced by its use in Roman catacombs, although, as mentioned in the previous chapter, the earliest instances of such usage are difficult to date.²⁹ The first two secure examples of the chi-rho in such an epigraphic context date from 323 and 331. In the earliest funerary inscription, the chi-rho was employed as an abbreviation of Christ's name in the phrase *in pace Christi*,³⁰ while the later inscription presents a more advanced stage in the usage of that sign, which functions both as an abbreviation in the expression *in signo Christi* and as a free-standing symbol preceding the entire epigraph.³¹ Another example of very early usage may be viewed on the marble Roman sarcophagus that a certain Aurelius Filtatus made for

²⁴ Bruun, 'The Victorious Signs', pp. 45–6; Bardill, *Constantine*, pp. 160 and 174–9.

²⁵ It has been suggested that the medallions of this type were stuck for distribution among Constantine's officers to celebrate his *decennalia*: RIC, vol. 7, p. 364, no. 36; Overbeck, 'Das Münchner Medallion'; and Bardill, *Constantine*, pp. 177–8.

²⁶ Bardill, *Constantine*, pp. 172–3. On other examples of the chi-rho being used as a mintmark in those years, see Odahl, 'Christian Symbolism', pp. 127–31.

²⁷ Salama, 'Les provinces d'Afrique', pp. 153–7; Lenski, *Constantine*, pp. 8–9 and 71.

²⁸ Salama, 'Le plus ancien chrisme'; and Salama, 'Anniversaires impériaux', pp. 139–44.

²⁹ Mazzoleni, 'Origine e cronologia'.

³⁰ ICUR, vol. 7, no. 17425 (EDB, no. 17717). Wuschmeyer, 'Christogramm', p. 539.

³¹ ICUR, vol. 8, no. 21597 (EDB, no. 35783); Bruun, 'The Victorious Signs', p. 43.

his deceased daughter, dated to the first third of the fourth century: in its central *clipeus* a simple chi-rho preceded the funerary text.³²

Further evidence for the familiarity of the chi-rho to Christians in Italy, and for its public visibility soon after the Battle of the Milvian Bridge, appears on surviving early fourth-century pavement mosaics in the basilica of Aquileia, then the largest city-port of the North Adriatic. These floor mosaics would have cost more than 400 gold *solidi* to make, and are typical of the fourth century, using traditional classical motifs to communicate early Christian symbolic messages: a bucolic scene/the Good Shepherd, a fish/symbol of Christ in the central medallion surrounded by the portraits of anonymous donors, various ornaments and knots of cruciform shape, and others besides. Surviving fragments of wall paintings also show geometrical and cruciform ornaments. That a sumptuous church built soon after the end of the Great Persecutions accommodated symbolism that catered to the visual tastes of its wealthy early fourth-century Aquileian donors should not surprise us.³³ A single chi-rho, placed in the dedication medallion of the basilica's founder, Bishop Theodorus, remains the only demonstrably Christian sign on the surviving mosaics, and is placed in the south hall of his *domus ecclesiae*. Theodorus is mentioned in the materials of the Synod of Arles (314), and his pontificate is traditionally dated c.308–19.³⁴ So the basilica and its impressive mosaics was probably created in the years after the so-called 'Edict of Milan' and before the bishop's demise, c.313–19. Much like the design of the *clipeus* in the above-mentioned sarcophagus of Filtatus, the simple chi-rho in the basilica of Aquileia is placed in a medallion and located above an inscription, which refers to Heaven (*caelitus*) entrusting the Aquileian Christian community to the bishop, and thus can be interpreted as a celestial sign of his divine Lord (*Κύριος*): 'O happy Theodorus, with the help of Almighty God and the flock trusted to you by the heaven you have blessedly made and gloriously dedicated everything' (Fig. 2.2).³⁵

By the mid-320s, when Sol Invictus disappeared from Constantinian coinage,³⁶ the chi-rho became the principal symbol of victorious imperial authority at the court of Constantine I, as the *versus intexti* of Publilius Optatianus Porfyrius show us conclusively.³⁷ Following the earlier tradition of Hellenistic calligraphic poetry, these poems are framed by geometrical forms and certain letters. In addition, three of Porfyrius' compositions (poems 8, 14, and 19) include chi-rhos of the elongated

³² *Repertorium der christlich-antiken Sarkophage*, vol. 1, no. 132, p. 88.

³³ Testini, *Aquileia*, pp. 369–98; Marini and Adrian, *I mosaici*; Bisconti, 'Tra Aquileia e Spalato'; Lehmann, 'Die frühchristlichen Mosaiken'; Brown, *Through the Eye*, pp. 39–40; Cuscito, 'Aquileia'; Novello, 'Aquileia'.

³⁴ Testini, *Aquileia*, p. 368.

³⁵ 'THEODORE FELI[X / A]DIUVANTE DEO / OMNIPOTENTE ET / POEMNIO CAELITUS TIBI / [TRA]DITUM OMNIA / [B]AEATE FECISTI ET / GLORIOSE DEDICASTI.' On the concurrent perception of God and Christ as king and relevant literature, see Bardill, *Constantine*, pp. 341–54.

³⁶ For details and references, see Bardill, *Constantine*, p. 331.

³⁷ For further details and references, see Publilius Optatianus Porfyrius, *Carmina*; Levitan, 'Dancing'; Ernst, *Carmen figuratum*, pp. 97–142; Bruhat, *Les 'carmina figurata'*; Wienand, *Der Kaiser als Sieger*, pp. 355–402; Squire, 'Patterns'; Squire, 'How to Read'; Squire, 'POP Art'; Squire and Whitton, 'Machina sacra'; Squire and Wienand, eds, *Morphogrammata*.



Fig. 2.2. Dedication medallion in the basilica of Aquileia.

type very similar to that in the Aquileian basilica.³⁸ Porphyrius composed these poems while in exile c.322–6 and sent them along with other visual poems to Constantine I, probably on the occasion of the twentieth imperial anniversary of the emperor and the tenth imperial anniversary of his two sons in 326.³⁹ The gift must have impressed its imperial recipient: Porphyrius was permitted to return from his exile and even to hold the office of Roman urban prefect in 329 and 333.⁴⁰

In one case (poem 8), a structuring chi-rho is accompanied by the monumental letters of the name IESVS, themselves distributed in a clockwise pattern between the chi-rho's arms (Fig. 2.3). This graphic device thus presents a divine name, Jesus Christ, in monogrammatic form. In another case (poem 19), a chi-rho depicts the mast of the ship that also incorporates the Latin number XX referring to Constantine's imperial anniversary (Fig. 2.4), and should consequently be interpreted

³⁸ For a detailed discussion of the chi-rho in these poems and relevant bibliography, see Squire and Whitton, '*Machina sacra*'. I omit another poem presenting a chi-rho, poem 24, from my discussion because its attribution to Porphyrius has been questioned in academic literature. See *Publilius Optatianus Porphyrii Carmina*, vol. 1, pp. xxix–xxxi, and vol. 2, pp. 153 and 157–8; Bruhat, *Les 'carmina figurata'*, pp. 38–9. Cf. Barnes, 'Publilius Optatianus Porphyrius', p. 174; Ernst, *Carmen figuratum*, pp. 98 and 138; and Squire and Whitton, '*Machina sacra*', pp. 86–91.

³⁹ Cf. Squire and Whitton, '*Machina sacra*', note 55, dating poem 8 slightly earlier, to c.320–1.

⁴⁰ Barnes, 'Publilius Optatianus Porphyrius'; Wienand, *Der Kaiser*, pp. 355–61 and 371–3; Squire and Whitton, '*Machina sacra*', p. 49.

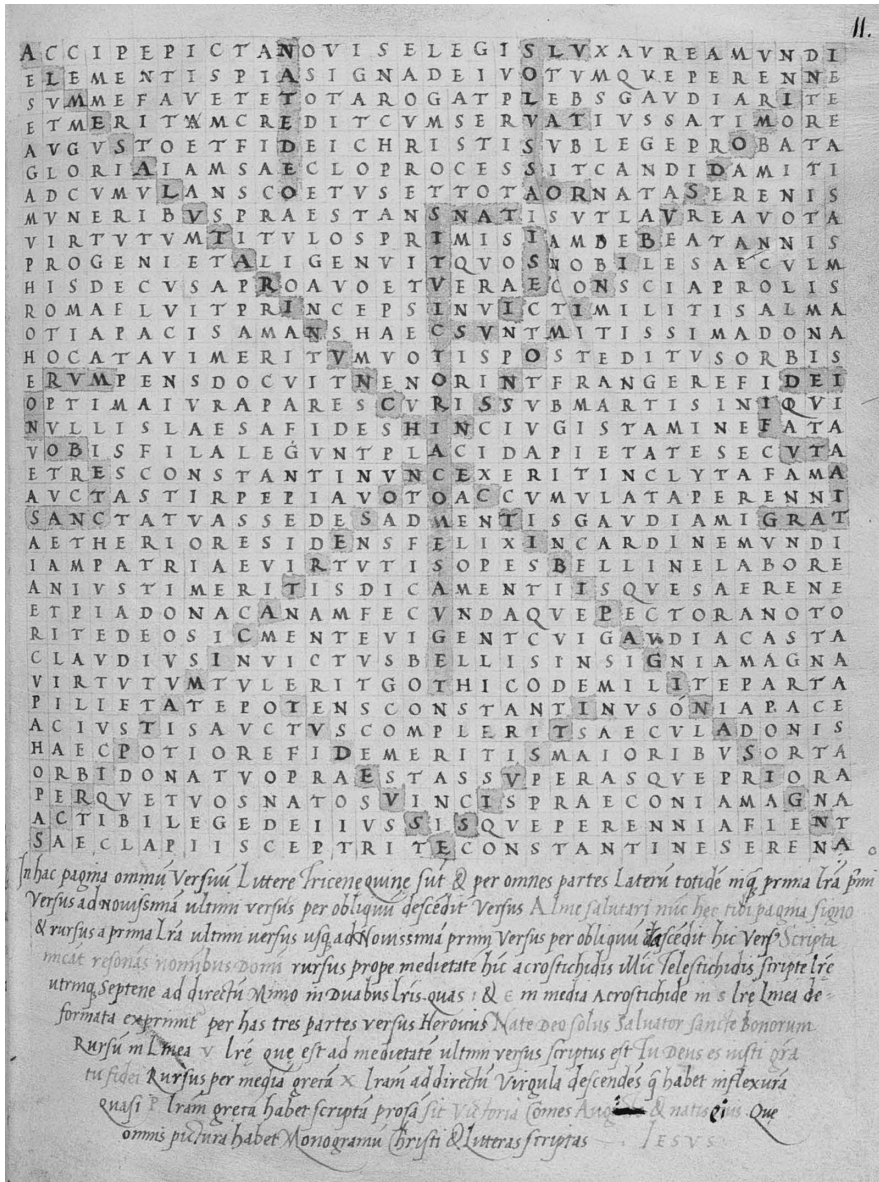


Fig. 2.3. Optatianus, Poem 8, in Wolfenbüttel, HAB, Cod. Guelf. 9 Aug. 4, fol. 11r. © HAB Wolfenbüttel <<http://diglib.hab.de/mss/9-aug-4f/start.htm>>

as a victorious symbol of imperial triumph. In these two cases, the chi-rho is referred to as *salutare* or *caeleste signum*. The third instance in Poem 14 glorifies the defeat of Licinius (324), and hence the chi-rho structuring those poetical verses also reveals a strong triumphal connotation. That none of the chi-rhos are accompanied by an alpha and omega suggests that the Christological implications of these two

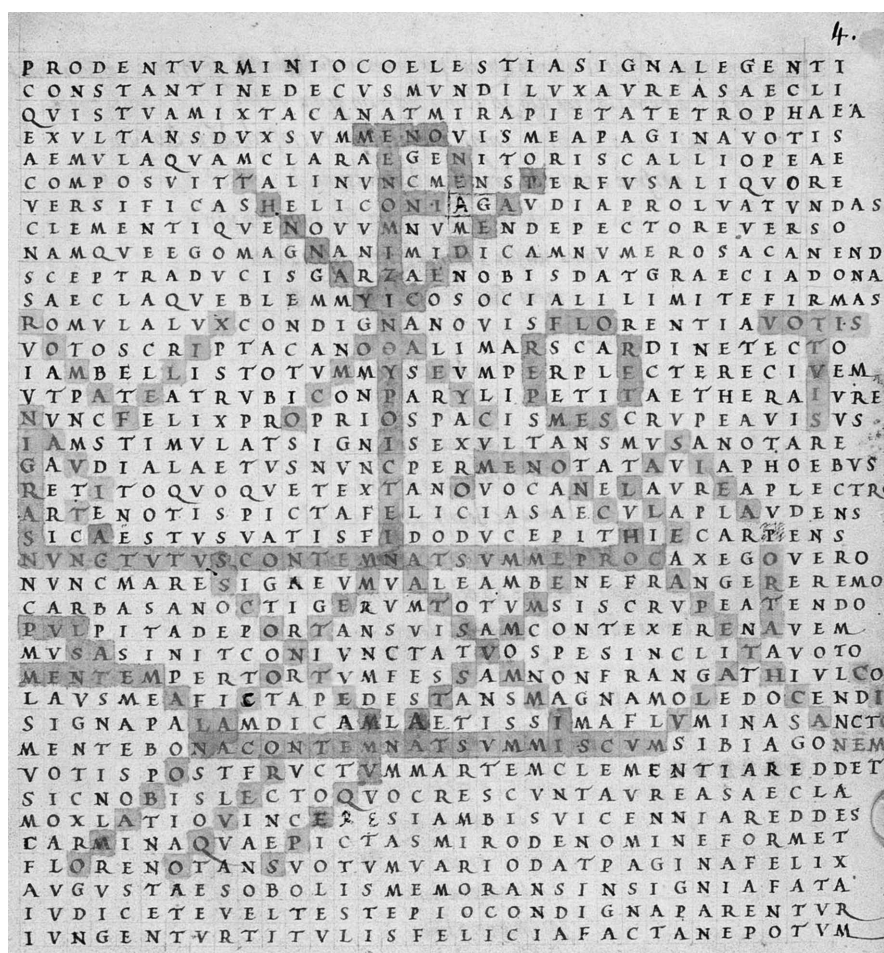


Fig. 2.4. Optatianus, Poem 19, in Wolfenbüttel, HAB, Cod. Guelf. 9 Aug. 4, fol. 4r. © HAB Wolfenbüttel <<http://diglib.hab.de/mss/9-aug-4f/start.htm>>

letters had less importance in the Constantinian age.⁴¹ All in all, Porphyrius seems to have chosen this new graphic device for his calligraphic verses because he perceived the chi-rho to be both the most popular contemporary Christian sign, and a triumphant celestial symbol of Constantinian emperorship. In his precarious situation in exile, Porphyrius must have been sensitive to the current atmosphere and preferences of the Constantinian court in order to ensure his innovative graphic verses would receive a benevolent response from their imperial recipients. In this vein, the creation of at least three calligraphic poems featuring the chi-rho as a graphic frame, and the complete absence of other christograms in Porphyrius' visual poetry, shows beyond any doubt which Christian sign held the place of honour at the court of Constantine I in the mid-320s.

⁴¹ Cf. Squire and Whitton, '*Machina sacra*', pp. 92–4.

The evidence of Roman coinage in the second quarter of the fourth century further bolsters the unquestionable position of the chi-rho as the prime Christian symbol in an imperial context in the later reign of Constantine I as well as during the reigns of his sons. Before the mid-320s, the rare placement of chi-rhos on Constantinian coins of the Western Roman empire seems to have been the result of local initiatives. The situation changed, however, after three events in the mid-320s: the defeat of Licinius in 324, Constantine's involvement in the Council of Nicea in 325, and the twentieth anniversary of his reign in 326. After these events, the triumphant standard marked with the chi-rho was introduced onto gold medallions in Siscia in 326, and onto a rare copper issue in Constantinople in 327–8 (Fig. 2.5).⁴² In both cases, the chi-rho functioned not as a purely apotropaic sign (as it probably did on the coin-medallions struck in Ticinum about a decade earlier) but also as a triumphant symbol of Constantinian emperorship. In that capacity, military standards carrying the chi-rho became a recurrent visual motif on Roman coins of the 330s and 340s (Fig. 2.6), as well as in the second half of the fourth century.⁴³

Eusebius' ekphrastic description of the *labarum* in the late 330s indicates that this change in numismatic iconography accurately represented concurrent imperial symbolism. Its appeal to Roman elites can be deduced from the evidence that a simplified version of this triumphant trophy, featuring a chi-rho inside a laurel wreath, appeared as an object of adoration on the central frontal part of some figurative sarcophagi produced in Rome between the mid-fourth century and the beginning of the fifth century.⁴⁴



Fig. 2.5. Copper coin of Constantine I (Constantinople, 327–8). London, BrM. © The Trustees of the British Museum.

⁴² Bruun, 'The Victorious Signs', pp. 45–6; RIC, vol. 7, pp. 566–7 and 573; Bardill, *Constantine*, pp. 143 and 176; and Hollard and López Sánchez, *Le Chrisme*, p. 62.

⁴³ Bruun, 'The Victorious Signs', pp. 47–56.

⁴⁴ *Repertorium der christlich-antiken Sarkophagi*, vol. 1, nos. 49, 59, 61, 175, 208, 224, 653, and 933; *Repertorium der christlich-antiken Sarkophagi*, vol. 3, no. 124; and Koch, *Frühchristliche Sarkophagi*, pp. 194, 292, 294, 315–16, and 320.



Fig. 2.6. Silver coin of Constantine II (Siscia, 337–40). Oslo University, Museum of Cultural History.

Increasing imperial use of the chi-rho from the 330s onwards occurred side by side with its growing popularity in Roman-Christian epigraphics. Carlo Carletti has estimated that christograms are present on 10 per cent of early Christian funerary inscriptions, and this seems to be a fair number for the surviving fourth-century epigraphs from Roman catacombs.⁴⁵ Yet such a figure does not take into account diachronic changes in the usage of christograms in the course of that century. No epigraphic record securely dated to before 323 includes a christogram, and as surviving epigraphic material with precise dating suggests (Charts 2.1–3),⁴⁶ the use of the chi-rho noticeably increased in the 330–50s, when it appeared on approximately 10–14 per cent of inscriptions. The chi-rho remained the christogram par excellence of this medium, until other Christian signs started to appear in that context in the 380s.

Furthermore, this christogram represents the only graphic sign that appeared on fourth-century Christian gold glasses, originally created as vessel bases or ‘blobs’ decorating the walls of vessels.⁴⁷ Such vessels might have had ceremonial functions, and most with known provenance served as decorative elements in Roman catacombs, fixed onto surfaces of *loculi*. The decoration of these Christian gold glasses usually featured figural imagery, and chi-rhos occur extremely rarely alongside such decoration, where the sign was typically placed between two human figures who might represent a range of individuals including biblical personages, Roman popes and saints, or well-to-do Christians. In all these cases, the chi-rho refers graphically to Christ, and in some cases is also treated as an object of adoration.⁴⁸ Identifiable samples of this small corpus feature Pope Damasus I (366–84) accompanied by his noble acquaintances, as well as saints. The corpus

⁴⁵ ‘Un monogramma’, p. 127.

⁴⁶ The charts are based on the data derived from *The Epigraphic Database Bari* at <http://www.edb.uniba.it>, created by a project team led by Carlo Carletti, and ICUR.

⁴⁷ Cf. also the Homblières Cup with a chi-rho on its bottom, dated to the second half of the fourth century; Coche de la Ferté, *L'antiquité*, no. 54, pp. 175–6.

⁴⁸ Grig, ‘Portraits’; and Morey, *The Gold-Glass*, nos. 36, 72, 76, 106, and 112. This corpus includes close to three hundred specimens and only about a dozen of them feature a chi-rho.

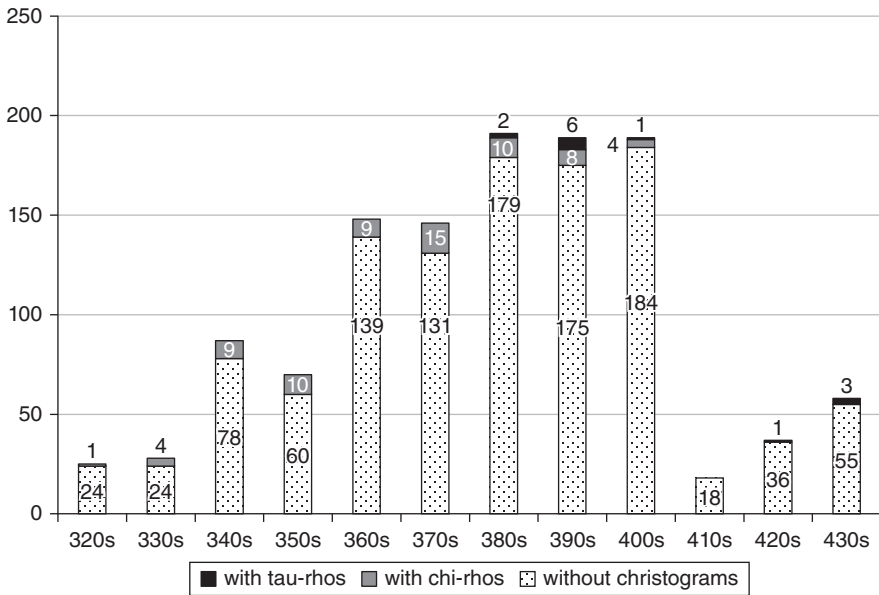


Chart 2.1. Chi-rhos and tau-rhos on datable Roman Christian inscriptions from the 320s to 430s (absolute numbers).

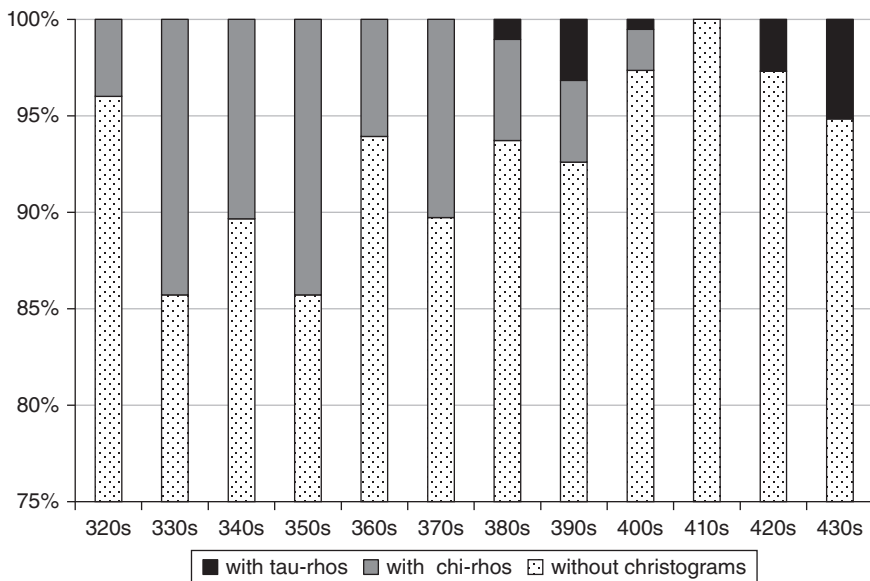


Chart 2.2. Chi-rhos and tau-rhos on datable Roman Christian inscriptions from the 320s to 430s (percentage).

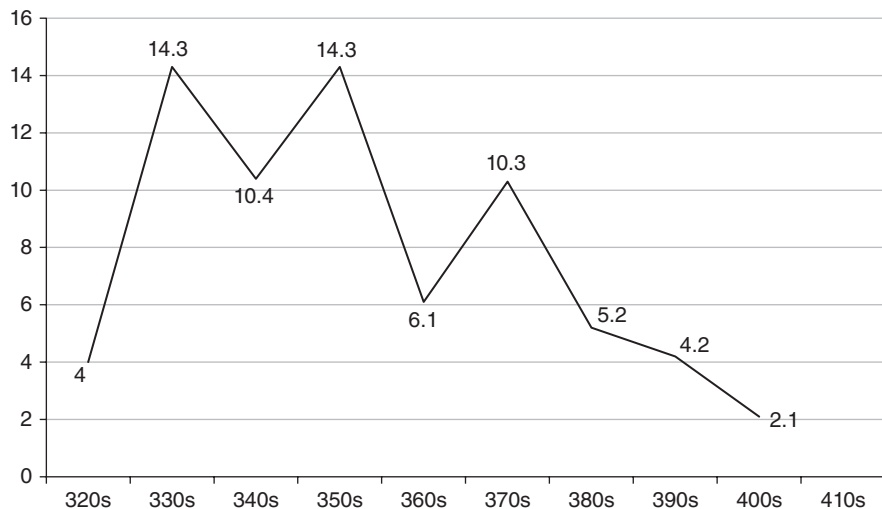


Chart 2.3. Percentage of datable Roman Christian inscriptions with chi-rhos from the 320s to 400s.



Fig. 2.7. Gold glass with Sts Peter and Paul. New York, MMA, acc. no. 16.174.3.

thus suggests that this type of decoration was somehow connected to Damasus and produced during his pontificate. Another group of gold glasses, featuring Sts Peter and Paul flanking a column surmounted by a chi-rho in a circle (Fig. 2.7), have similarly been attributed to the second half of the fourth century.⁴⁹

Thus, the chi-rho that began to appear in different media from the second half of Constantine's reign onwards fulfilled two functions. On the one hand, a simple chi-rho became a primary graphic sign of the divine Lord, which could be occasionally used by both Christian clerics like Bishop Theodorus and Pope Damasus,

⁴⁹ Grig, 'Portraits', pp. 208–18; and Noga-Banai, 'Between Rome and Jerusalem', p. 57.

and by Christians of different status buried in Roman catacombs.⁵⁰ On the other hand, it entered the corpus of imperial symbols as a triumphant Christian sign and in this capacity became associated with the imperial *labarum*. As demonstrated by the Roman marble sarcophagi discussed above, this imperial motif evidently pleased the visual tastes of some Christian *clarissimi* in the eternal City, a perhaps unsurprising outcome when one considers that the creators of such sarcophagi increasingly expressed Christian devotion through imagery borrowed from both the imperial court and the emperor's army.⁵¹

2.3. THE HIERARCHY OF CHRISTIAN SIGNS IN THE VISUAL COMMUNICATION OF IMPERIAL AUTHORITY IN THE SECOND HALF OF THE FOURTH AND EARLY FIFTH CENTURIES

The use of the chi-rho on various objects, and its simultaneous imperial connotations, became especially noticeable in the western Roman provinces. As pointed out by Susan Pearce, evidence from fourth-century Gaul and Britain reveals this developing trend, and chi-rhos were regularly placed not only on artefacts related to the Christian cult⁵² but also on objects associated with imperial governance including lead seals, pewter ingots, copper grain measures, and signet-rings probably worn by government officials (Fig. 2.8).⁵³ Gold rings with chi-rhos might have been dispatched as imperial gifts to high-standing officials as early as the reign of Constans I (337–50), a practice demonstrated by a ring from the Ferrell Collection that combines a chi-rho with an inscription swearing allegiance to Constans.⁵⁴ Yet the practice of placing chi-rhos on objects related to the imperial sphere in the Roman West became especially noticeable in the second half of the fourth century, as evinced by the employment of that symbol on datable finds of defensive armour and dress accessories of imperial representatives, the majority of which emanate from the north-western Roman provinces. In this period, the symbol might first have been introduced—as both an imperial and apotropaic sign—onto the helmets

⁵⁰ Chi-rhos appear not only on funerary *tabulae* but also on sarcophagi. For example, a simple chi-rho marks out a Roman sarcophagus dated to 363, which is now in the Louvre, Paris: *Repertorium der christlich-antiken Sarkophage*, vol. 3, no. 433; earlier described in *Inscriptiones Christianae*, ed. de Rossi, vol. 1, no. 161.

⁵¹ For more details, see Brown, *Through the Eye*, p. 250.

⁵² As, for example, on liturgical objects from the Water Newton Treasure discussed in Chapter 1 or on liturgical spoons from the Mildenhall Treasure dated to c.360, see Painter, 'The Mildenhall Treasure'; and Kent and Painter, eds, *Wealth*, pp. 33–9, nos. 54–79; the spoons nos. 74–6. See also the use of chi-rhos on the Coffin of St Paulinus dated to the second half of the fourth century: Trier, Rheinisches Landesmuseum, inv. no. 99.1373.

⁵³ Pearce, 'The Hinton', pp. 200–1. The gold rings from the British Museum (reg. nos. 1983.1003.1 and 1984.1001.1) are representative of such signet-rings. As pointed out by Spier, *Late Antique and Early Christian Gems*, pp. 22–4, no. 42, and pp. 183–5, nos. R4–R50, nearly all fourth-century rings engraved with chi-rho are from western provinces.

⁵⁴ Spier, *Treasures*, pp. 62–3, no. 43; and Spier, *Byzantium*, pp. 56–7, fig. 5.2.



Fig. 2.8. Gold rings with chi-rhos, England, fourth century. London, BrM, reg. nos. 1983,1003.1 and 1984,1001.1. © The Trustees of the British Museum.

of imperial officers stationed along the European *limes* of the Roman empire,⁵⁵ and were very soon added to the crossbow brooches used to fasten military cloaks of high-ranking imperial officials. Surviving examples of such brooches have been dated to the period beginning in the second half of the fourth century and ending with the first half of the fifth century.⁵⁶ Yet the utilization of the chi-rho on such objects in this imperial sphere was not a widespread phenomenon. As Christoph Eger has demonstrated, this sign (in some cases accompanied by an alpha and omega) was placed on only approximately 13 per cent of surviving crossbow fibulas of type 5 attributed to the period in question; the percentage corresponds—with striking similarity—to the above-mentioned number of funerary epigraphs with chi-rhos in fourth-century Roman catacombs.⁵⁷

Probably because of this imperial association, in the middle and second half of the fourth century chi-rho symbols began to adorn floor mosaics in aristocratic villas located in northern Spain, such as the Villa Fortunatus at Fraga.⁵⁸ In Britain too, this graphic symbol was used in late antique villas at Hinton St Mary and Frampton in Dorset, both of which were located in the vicinity of the Roman city *Durnovaria* (Dorchester). The mid-fourth-century mosaics in these villas are replete with mythological and hunting scenes, foliage and ivy-leaf scrolls, and

⁵⁵ For more details and references, see Mackensen, 'Vergoldete Bronzebeschläge'; and Miks, 'Hoc signo'.

⁵⁶ Eger, 'Between Amuletic Ornament', pp. 291–303.

⁵⁷ Eger, 'Between Amuletic Ornament', pp. 293–5.

⁵⁸ At that villa, a chi-rho divides the name FORTV/NATVS accompanying one of the late Roman floor mosaics: Serra Rafols, 'La Villa Fortunatus', p. 29 and plate 10; and Pearce, 'The Hinton', p. 199. See also Brandenburg, 'Christussymbole', pp. 74–188 and pp. 126–7, who emphasizes the perceived apotropaic quality of the chi-rho as one of the reasons for their secular use in the western provinces.



Fig. 2.9. Mosaic from Hinton St Mary, England. London, BrM, reg. no. 1965,0409.1. © The Trustees of the British Museum.

represent a symbiosis of Bacchic (presumably Orphic) and Christian motifs.⁵⁹ In both cases, the chi-rho might have been incorporated into these mosaics because of its symbolic significance for contemporary Roman emperors (Fig. 2.9).⁶⁰

This striking imperial connotation of christograms used in western provinces is exemplified by the *Salus* series of large copper coins issued in Gaulic mints in 352–3 in the name of the imperial contender in the West, Magnentius, and in the name of his son, Decentius. The series represented the first numismatic case of the use of chi-rhos as a reverse type (Fig. 2.10).⁶¹ Magnentius strived to bolster his imperial position in the Western Roman empire by presenting himself in the guise

⁵⁹ Perring, “Gnosticism”, esp. p. 101. Perring argues that this iconography shows the explicit adaptation of Bacchic-Orphic ideas by Christian worshippers and should be understood in the context of Gnostic Christianity that supposedly flourished among a large proportion of the Romano-British elite before the imperial suppression of deviant Gnostic practices in the 370–80s. Cf. Stroumsa, ‘The Afterlife’, who points to difficulties in distinguishing Orphic, Gnostic, and Christian traditions in this period.

⁶⁰ At Hinton St Mary (Fig. 2.9), this symbol marks a bust in a central medallion that has been interpreted as representing either Christ or an emperor. As Christ: Toynbee, ‘A New Roman Mosaic Pavement’; Painter, ‘The Roman Site’; and Painter, ‘The Design’. As an emperor: Pearce, ‘The Hinton’, pp. 201–18. The fact that the Hinton bust is dressed in a *pallium*, the dress that is associated with Christ, biblical figures, and saints in early Christian art, is in favour of the first interpretation; Urbano, “Dressing a Christian”.

⁶¹ RIC, vol. 8, p. 43, Amiens, nos. 34–45; Trier, nos. 318–27; Lyons, nos. 153–76; Arles, nos. 188–202; Brenot, ‘À propos’; and Hollard and López Sánchez, *Le Chrisme*, pp. 69–77.



Fig. 2.10. Copper coin of Magnentius (Lyons, 352–3). Oslo University, Museum of Cultural History.

of Constantine's legitimate heir, and the numismatic appropriation of Constantine's triumphant symbol served that goal as well as marriage to the latter's distant relative Justina.⁶² The chi-rho on these coins was flanked by an alpha and omega, and this innovation has been usually viewed in the context of Magnentius' challenge to the Arian emperor Constantius II, since the addition of these two letters might have played on their strong anti-Arian Christological connotation, with reference to Revelations, 1. 8 and 22. 13. If this interpretation is correct, Magnentius thus chose to present himself as the imperial defender of orthodoxy in his struggle against Constantine I's own son.⁶³ In the end, this religious visual statement did not help Magnentius' cause, and he was defeated, dying ingloriously. After his demise, no imperial members of the Constantinian dynasty utilized the chi-rho as a numismatic type.

The introduction of an alpha and omega design onto Roman coinage corresponds chronologically to a similar usage of these symbolic letters in securely dated epigraphic evidence from Roman catacombs (Charts 2.4–5). The earliest precisely datable funerary inscription featuring a chi-rho and an alpha and omega was inscribed in 355,⁶⁴ and in the last four decades of the fourth century these apocalyptic letters accompanied the majority of epigraphic christograms in Rome. These data suggest that the appearance of the new numismatic form of chi-rho on Magnentius' coinage might have reflected a more general trend in the western Roman provinces. The western use of the two symbolic letters alongside christograms may have been prompted by strife between the adherents of Nicean orthodoxy, supported by the Western Roman emperors Constans I (337–50) and subsequently Magnentius and Valentinian I (364–75), and the Arians, supported by the Eastern emperors Constantius II (337–61) and later Valens I (364–78). It is noteworthy in this regard that a silver missorium traditionally associated with Valentinian I presents the

⁶² Van Dam, *Remembering Constantine*, pp. 48–9.

⁶³ Bruun, 'The Victorious Signs', pp. 52–4.

⁶⁴ *Inscriptiones Christianae*, ed. de Rossi, vol. 1, no. 127.

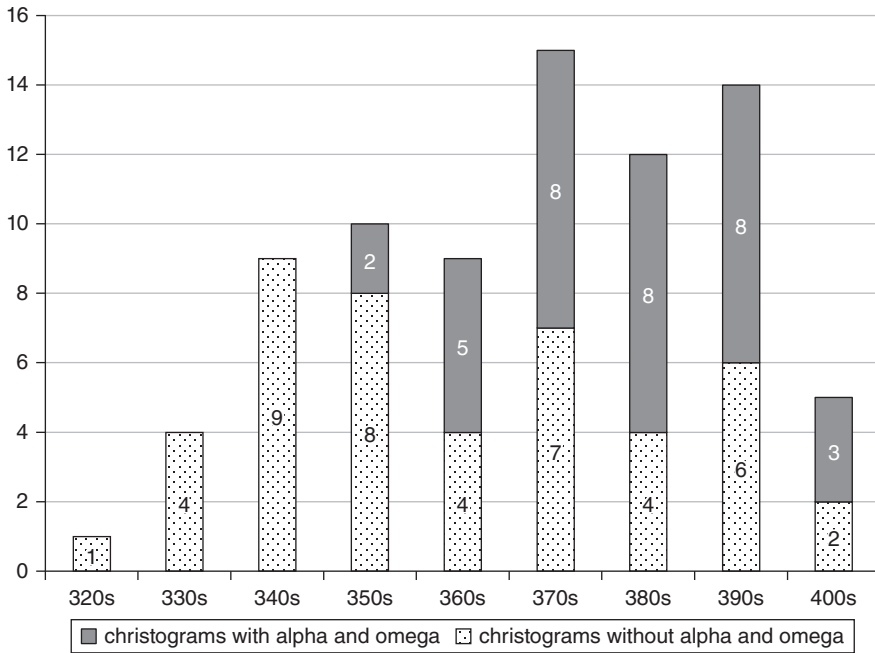


Chart 2.4. The use of an alpha and omega with christograms on datable Roman Christian inscriptions from the 320s to 400s (absolute numbers).

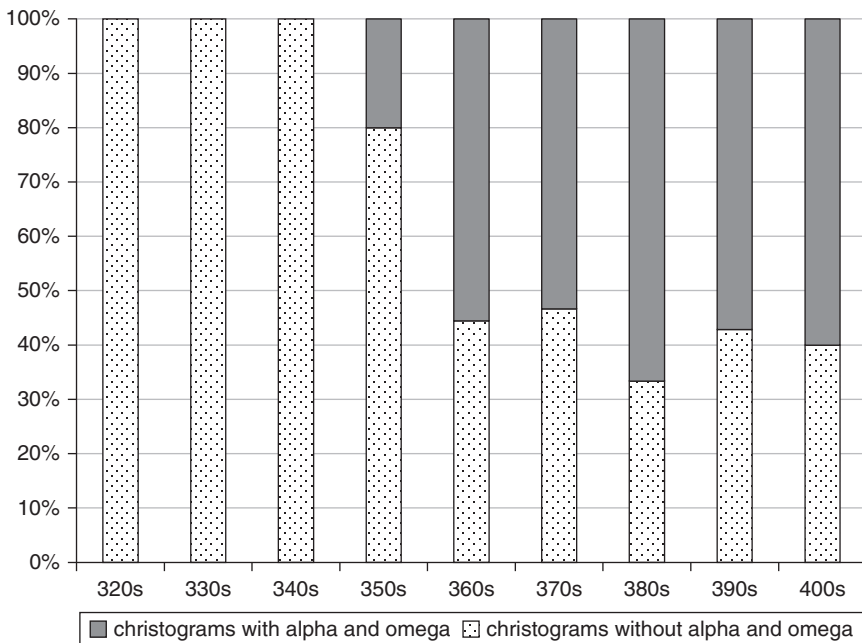


Chart 2.5. The use of an alpha and omega with christograms on datable Roman Christian inscriptions from the 320s to 400s (percentage).

emperor with a chi-rho in his halo accompanied by an alpha and omega,⁶⁵ while a silver plate from Kerch, produced in the East in the mid-fourth century and thought to represent the image of Constantius II, shows an imperial guard holding a shield decorated with a simple chi-rho.⁶⁶ The religious confrontation of the 340–70s might have encouraged supporters of the Nicene Creed to furnish epigraphic christograms with an alpha and omega that undoubtedly emphasized the divine nature of Jesus, and the previously mentioned staurogram that appears alongside these two letters in the so-called *domus Faustae* may represent one of the earliest examples of such usage within Rome.

The *domus Faustae* fresco perhaps also represents one of the earliest instances of the Roman use of the tau-rho. The Catacombs of Priscilla provide the earliest occurrence of that symbol in a funerary Christian context that can be precisely dated—namely to the year 355. But at that early date the tau-rho remained an iconographic element, a long monogrammatic cross held by a biblical figure.⁶⁷ Later on, an identical visual motif appeared on rare solidi of the Western Roman emperor Honorius struck in Ravenna c.413; the reverse shows the triumphant emperor bearing a long monogrammatic cross instead of the traditional military standard, while the hand of God crowns him with a wreath.⁶⁸ The surviving evidence indicates that the tau-rho sign was occasionally employed in Roman epigraphy during the second half of the fourth century,⁶⁹ but only with the declining usage of the chi-rho in the 380–90s (Chart 2.3) did the former sign begin to appear frequently as an alternative Christian symbol in such an epigraphic context. Similar to the chi-rho, an alpha and omega often accompanied the tau-rho, and this new form of christogram seems to have superseded the chi-rho in Roman funerary epigraphy in the first decades of the fifth century (Charts 2.1–2). The evidence of the Roman catacombs is corroborated by the presence of staurograms on funerary mosaics, for instance those in Tabarka and Furnos Minus in North Africa dated to the end of the fourth and the beginning of the fifth centuries, and those on floor mosaics in the Lebanese church of Zahrani dated to the late fourth century.⁷⁰ Furthermore, the employment of the tau-rho and the sign of the cross in the Roman catacombs had somewhat similar chronological developments, which may explain the growing popularity of the former sign: it combined the graphic structure of the cross with the first letters of Christ's name, where a chi was turned sideways, and thus could represent to the viewer both the chi-rho and the cross.

This interpretation is further supported by visual evidence from the Roman East. The tau-rho appears by the side of the sign of the cross in Oxyrhynchus

⁶⁵ Since the object is heavily worn, they are apparently visible only in the old photograph. For details, see Pearce, 'The Hinton', p. 208, note 130.

⁶⁶ Cecchelli, *Il trionfo*, fig. 45; and Bardill, *Constantine*, p. 161, fig. 100.

⁶⁷ ICUR, vol. 9, no. 24862 (EDB, no. 6893). On the tau-rho in this context, see Testini, *Archeologia cristiana*, p. 356.

⁶⁸ Grierson and Mays, *Catalogue*, p. 201, no. 742; and RIC, vol. 10, no. 1310.

⁶⁹ See, for example, the inscription allegedly carved in 368; *Inscriptiones Christianae*, ed. de Rossi, vol. 1, nos. 208, which is not included in EDB.

⁷⁰ Baratte, *Catalogue*, nos. 9 and 11, pp. 43–8; Brandenburg, 'Christussymbole', pp. 102–5, plate 11a.

papyri from late antique Egypt, where the earliest tau-rho was drawn in a letter dated to the mid-fourth century.⁷¹ Further evidence is provided by funerary stelae at Zoora in the Roman province of Palestina Tertia, modern Ghor es-Safi south of the Dead Sea; most of these stelae are provided with precise dates in their Greek epitaphs (Charts 2.6–7).⁷² The earliest tau-rho sign appeared in that epigraphic context in the same year as in the Roman catacombs, namely in 355,⁷³ approximately a decade after the sign of the cross began to be carved on those tombstones. As in the Roman catacombs, the visibility of the tau-rho in this cemetery located in the Roman East dramatically increased in the late fourth and early fifth centuries, but that symbol generally functioned in a supplementary manner to the sign of the cross. Corroboration comes from the evidence that many tombstones had outlined crosses with the letter chi inscribed at the middle, and often on the arms of the cross. Both types of crosses thus indirectly referred to Christ. Put succinctly, the increasing popularity of the tau-rho in the late fourth-century Roman empire most likely mirrored the growing popularity of the sign of the cross in the second half of the fourth century, a development that will be discussed in Chapter 3.

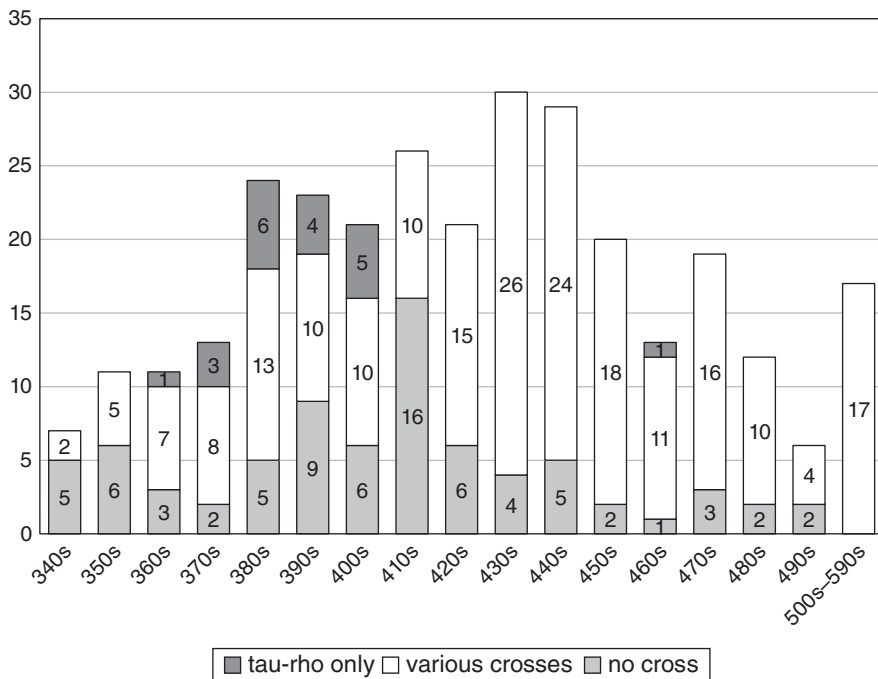


Chart 2.6. The use of crosses and tau-rhos on datable funerary inscriptions from Zoora from the 340s to the 490s.

⁷¹ Blumell, *Lettered Christians*, pp. 302 and 310; Ghignoli, ‘Writing Texts’, pp. 17–18.

⁷² Meimarīs and Kritikakou-Nikolaropoulou, *Inscriptions*.

⁷³ Meimarīs and Kritikakou-Nikolaropoulou, *Inscriptions*, vol. 1A, no. 14.

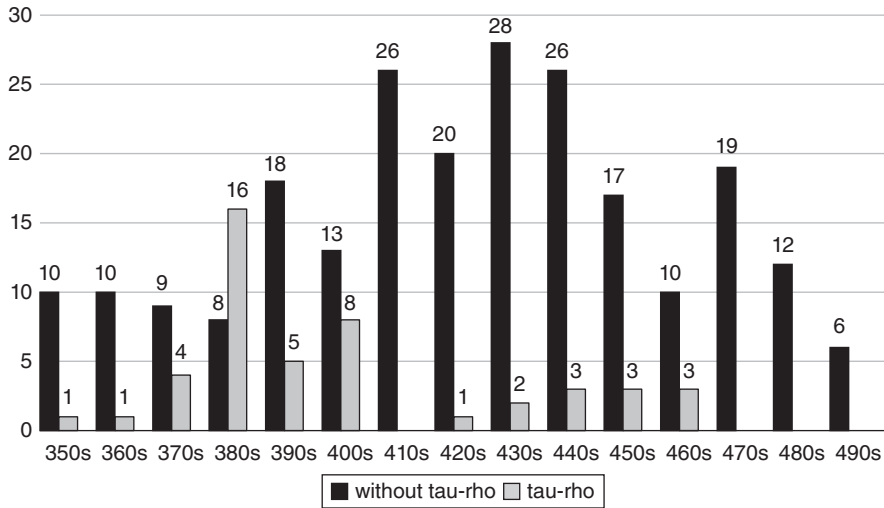


Chart 2.7. The use of tau-rhos on datable funerary inscriptions from Zoora from the 340s to the 490s.

By the late fourth and early fifth centuries, the chi-rho, tau-rho, and cross formed a new hierarchy of Christian signs observable in various media produced in the Theodosian period, including Eastern Roman coinage struck three decades after Magnentius' death, when the chi-rho reappeared as a coin type. A simple chi-rho within a laurel wreath was placed on the reverse of silver siliquae and gold tremisses (1/3 of the solidus) produced in Constantinople in the name of Empress Aelia Flaccilla (383–5), the Spanish wife of Theodosius I. These rare coin issues were probably struck when she was elevated to Augusta in 383,⁷⁴ since the new reverse type certainly inspired the first precisely datable appearance of a similar 'triumphant' chi-rho in a Roman funerary inscription carved in the following year (384).⁷⁵

Thereafter, this 'triumphant' chi-rho was placed on silver coins and gold semisses (2/3 of the solidus) of Aelia Eudoxia (Fig. 2.11), who married Flaccilla's imperial son, Arcadius, in 395, and was herself crowned as Augusta in 400.⁷⁶ This numismatic series continued into the reign of Eudoxia's son, Theodosius II, when identical semisses were struck in Constantinople in the name of his imperial sister and wife, Aelia Pulcheria and Aelia Eudocia respectively.⁷⁷ The semisses were the denomination of late imperial gold coinage that was traditionally struck for special occasions, and the coins in question were probably ceremonial issues produced to commemorate the women's imperial coronations as Augusta in 414 and 423. It is salient to note that tremisses and siliquae of similar design were produced in the

⁷⁴ RIC, vol. 9, p. 232, nos. 76 and 78; and Holum, *Theodosian Empresses*, pp. 28–9.

⁷⁵ ICUR, vol. 7, no. 19963 (EDB, no. 21504).

⁷⁶ Grierson and Mays, *Catalogue*, pp. 133–5; and RIC, vol. 10, nos. 18 and 46.

⁷⁷ Grierson and Mays, *Catalogue*, pp. 152–6; and RIC, vol. 10, nos. 248 and 332.



Fig. 2.11. Semissis of Aelia Eudoxia (Constantinople, c.400). London, BrM, reg. no. 1839,0311.1. © The Trustees of the British Museum.



Fig. 2.12. Tremissis of Aelia Eudocia (Constantinople, c.423–43). Princeton University Numismatic Collection, Department of Rare Books and Special Collections, Firestone Library.

name of the same empresses in the early fifth century. These featured a new reverse type, that of the sign of the Latin cross within a laurel wreath (Fig. 2.12).⁷⁸

Taken together, these semisses and tremisses highlight a new hierarchy of Christian symbols, in which a chi-rho within a laurel wreath functioned as a major graphic symbol of contemporary Christian emperorship. This impression is confirmed by the solidi issued in the names of the same empresses, the reverse of which shows the figural personification of Victory holding a shield with a triumphant chi-rho inscribed on it. In early issues, the chi-rho appears in an oval shield/medallion on a column, an image reminiscent of a similar motif produced in contemporary Rome on the above-mentioned gold glasses, where the monumental sign is accompanied by Sts Peter and Paul (Fig. 2.7).

The numismatic reverse type featuring a seated Victory with a chi-rho on her shield had been introduced onto the coins of Aelia Flaccilla when she became

⁷⁸ RIC, vol. 10, nos. 21, 50, 214, 252–3, 280–1, 383–4, and 387–8.

Augusta in 383.⁷⁹ At the same time, the solidi of Eudoxia, Pulcheria, and Eudocia presented an important deviation to this coin type, one already in use on early solidi of Arcadius: the obverse of their solidi shows a *dextera Dei* (a hand of God) placing a wreath on the head of an empress, symbolizing their imperial authority as directly descending from God.⁸⁰ The primary graphic symbols of Christ placed within a laurel wreath carried precisely the same message. The introduction of such symbols onto monetary issues, intended to illustrate the Theodosian empresses' newly established status, thus conveyed a preeminent aspect of their public image, simultaneously revealing that a reputation for piety was an important attribute of female imperial authority in the Eastern Roman empire. Pulcheria exemplified this new image especially, and publicly devoted her virginity to God, promoted the veneration of Mary as Theotokos, and was extolled for the patronage of holy men and for rich donations to the Church.⁸¹ As the aforementioned gold coins clearly indicate, Eudoxia and Eudocia did not differ from Pulcheria and propagated the same message of female imperial authority and its transcendent sources to the users of their coins.

Early monuments of imperial Constantinople reveal that the chi-rho dominated the staurogram in imperial visual propaganda, whilst also showing the steady rise to prominence of the sign of the cross. As pointed out by James Crow, a damaged chi-rho on the Aqueduct of Valens (373) provides the earliest extant monumental christogram in Constantinople.⁸² The Golden Gate, incorporated into the Theodosian Walls, preserves another monumental statement of authority visible from the inside of the imperial Capital, namely a chi-rho placed over the main arch and framed by a triumphant wreath (Fig. 2.13), with the latter reminiscent of the coinage of the Theodosian empresses. Simple crosses and tau-rhos were also placed on less prominent parts of this monument,⁸³ thus creating a hierarchy of symbols similar to that on the above coinage. Although the precise dating of the Golden Gate remains a matter of debate, it must have been erected either in the late fourth century or in the first quarter of the fifth century, roughly contemporary with the striking of the Theodosian empresses' coinage.⁸⁴ More precisely datable is the now-destroyed column of Arcadius (c.402/3), the top of which displayed four tau-rhos and four crosses. Three of the bas-relief sides of its base featured an image of two angels holding laurel wreaths, using the same two signs as the coins of the Theodosian empresses, a chi-rho on the south side and a cross on the west and east sides, and differing only in that an alpha and omega flanked the chi-rho on the monument.⁸⁵

⁷⁹ Holum, *Theodosian Empresses*, pp. 32–4; and RIC, vol. 9, p. 225, nos. 48–9.

⁸⁰ Holum, *Theodosian Empresses*, pp. 65–9 and 123.

⁸¹ Millar, *A Greek Roman Empire*, pp. 35–6; Holum, *Theodosian Empresses*, pp. 79–174; Harries, "Men without Women", pp. 67–73 and 88–9.

⁸² Crow, 'Blessing or Security?', pp. 153–4.

⁸³ For more details and references, see Crow, 'Blessing or Security?', pp. 148–51.

⁸⁴ Kazhdan, ed., *Oxford Dictionary of Byzantium*, p. 858; Bardill, 'The Golden Gate'; Asutay-Effenberger, *Die Landmauer*, pp. 54–61; Crow, 'Blessing or Security?', pp. 150–1.

⁸⁵ The drawings of this base were preserved in the so-called 'Freshfield album' drawn in the sixteenth century: Freshfield, 'Notes', pp. 101–2. A large carved chi-rho is said to have been carved on the ceiling of the vestibule inside the base accessed through the door on the north side, Freshfield, 'Notes', pp. 96–7.



Fig. 2.13. Chi-rho on the eastern side of the Golden Gate, Constantinople. Photo by James Crow.

Both media thus represent an identical attitude to the relative roles of the main Christian graphic signs in the visual communication of imperial authority, with the chi-rho assuming a more prominent position than the tau-rho, and the sign of the cross becoming increasingly important at the turn of the fifth century.

This attitude, evinced by various imperial media in the Eastern Roman empire and by coinage in particular, affected the visual tastes of Christians in remote parts of the Roman East, for instance in the already-mentioned funerary inscriptions in Zoora, where the chi-rho remained exceptionally rare in the late Roman period. Yet the symbol was carved onto a small number of tombstones precisely in the period when the ceremonial coins of the Theodosian empresses were struck. It first appeared on a stela dated to 391 and then was carved twice again, in 411 and 412.⁸⁶ A more complicated combination of tau-rho and chi-rho, a tau-rho-chi, were inscribed in 386 and 406.⁸⁷ Furthermore, an alpha and omega occasionally appeared in this context in the same period, with the first case dated to 383.⁸⁸

In the West, well-to-do Christians shared the imperial 'pantheon' of graphic signs in a more noticeable manner. Thus, the new graphic formula of the 'triumphant' chi-rho was introduced into Christian visual culture in late fourth-century Italy. A 'triumphant' chi-rho, similar to the one on the Golden Gate, can be viewed on the so-called Sarcophagus of Stilicho, now located at Sant'Ambrogio in Milan

⁸⁶ Meimaris and Kritikakou-Nikolaropoulou, *Inscriptions*, vol. 1A, nos. 63, 97, and 100.

⁸⁷ Meimaris and Kritikakou-Nikolaropoulou, *Inscriptions*, vol. 1A, no. 87, and vol. 1B, no. 17.

⁸⁸ Meimaris and Kritikakou-Nikolaropoulou, *Inscriptions*, vol. 1A, no. 45.



Fig. 2.14. 'Sarcophagus of Stilicho', Church of Sant'Ambrogio, Milan. Norwegian Institute in Rome, H. P. L'Orange Photo Archive.

(Fig. 2.14).⁸⁹ Another example of the triumphant symbol, identical to the chi-rho with an alpha and omega on the base of the column of Arcadius, has been discovered on fragments of a wall painting in a Roman villa at Lullingstone in Kent, probably in the late fourth century.⁹⁰

⁸⁹ The identity of the person it was made for remains a matter of speculation; Tcherikover, 'The Pulpit', pp. 48–9, note 55.

⁹⁰ Painter, 'The Lullingstone Wall-Plaster'; Frend, 'Pagans, Christians', p. 124, no. 24.

2.4. CHRISTOGRAMS AS PARADIGMATIC CHRISTIAN SYMBOLS AT THE TURN OF THE FIFTH CENTURY

The symbolic interplay between the chi-rho and tau-rho in both imperial and Christian elite culture at the turn of the fifth century is further illustrated by the encolpion that Empress Maria received on the occasion of her wedding to Emperor Honorius in 398, found in her tomb in the basilica of St Peter in Rome.⁹¹ On its frontal side (Fig. 2.15) the names of the imperial couple and Maria's parents, Stilicho and Serena, all in the vocative, are written in crossing lines to form a chi-rho sign; the names of the older couple form X while those of their young daughter and her imperial groom form P. The chi-rho here probably represents the pre-eminent imperial sign, especially when compared to the 'Rothschild Cameo', which has been interpreted as an artefact produced to honour the same wedding.⁹² The cameo features two busts in a classicizing style, identified as Honorius and Maria. The former wears a ceremonial wreath with a square jewel inscribed with a simple chi-rho,⁹³ a triumphant imperial sign intended to connect its wearer with the first Christian emperor, Constantine I.

While the chi-rho connects the members of Stilicho's family to Emperor Honorius, another Christian sign on the encolpion of Maria, the tau-rho, reveals the second graphic message of the encolpion: the Christian wedding acclamation *Honori [et] Maria vivatis* ('Honorius and Maria, may you live!'). The second part of this acclamation—in *Christo*—is implied by the above-mentioned chi-rho, which, as mentioned earlier in this chapter, carried this meaning in early Christian epigraphs. Such an interpretation is corroborated by the other side of the encolpion, which presents the same graphic devices made of the names of Maria's parents and her brother and sister, Eucherius and Thermantia. Yet it is not the names of the siblings but those of the parents that create the letter rho on this side, while their children's names form the chi. As a result of this change, the tau-rho on the rear contains the phrase *Stelicho [et] Serena vivatis [in Christo]*, an acclamation appropriate for the older couple but not for their unmarried children.

At the middle of the graphic composition on the frontal side, one can see an ankh-cross, which was appropriated by the Christian Copts as a symbol of eternal life referring to Christ's passion.⁹⁴ This symbol divides the verb *vivatis* and thus explains the deep meaning of the phrase '*vivatis in Christo*' (may you live in Christ): it refers, first and foremost, to eternal life, the promise of which became possible through the Crucifixion of Christ symbolized by the staurogram. To ensure that this wish be fulfilled, a holy relic was encapsulated in the encolpion. So the process

⁹¹ Parrot and Adhemar, eds, *Vingt ans d'acquisitions*, p. 76, no. 234; and Weitzmann, ed., *Age of Spirituality*, p. 306, no. 279.

⁹² For more details and references, see Sande, 'The Iconography and Style of the Rothschild Cameo'. For its attribution to Constantius II and his wedding in 335, see Spier, *Late Antique and Early Christian Gems*, pp. 131–2, no. 712.

⁹³ Elsner, *Imperial Rome*, p. 86; and Bojcov, 'Der Heilige Kranz'.

⁹⁴ Weitzmann, ed., *Age of Spirituality*, p. 494. The origins of the ankh-cross will be discussed in more detail in Chapter 3.



Fig. 2.15. Frontal side of the Encolpion of Empress Maria (398–407). Paris, Musée du Louvre, acc. no. OA9523. Photo (C) RMN-Grand Palais (musée du Louvre)/Droits réservés.

of graphic encoding on this luxurious object, which was most likely commissioned by Stilicho and his wife as a bridal gift to their daughter, was guided by the two Christian signs that became pre-eminently popular among Christian elites at the turn of the fifth century. Some features of this encolpion show eastern influences: firstly, its producer/s erroneously used a Greek eta instead of a Latin E, indicating familiarity with both Latin and Greek. Secondly, the use of the ankh-cross points to knowledge of the graphic conventions of the Eastern Mediterranean. In short, we are presented here with a product of cosmopolitan imperial culture, which

employed a complicated graphic composition that, properly speaking, is neither text nor image. It belongs to the realm of early Christian graphicacy, which at the turn of the fifth century was dominated by the chi-rho and tau-rho.

By the fifth century, these two signs also became paradigmatic symbols in Christian visual culture, especially in the West. They were deployed as focal points on many Christian artefacts, such as the sarcophagi produced in Toulouse in the second half of the fifth century,⁹⁵ or on mosaics in some fifth-century Christian churches, for instance within the Baptistry of San Giovanni in Fonte in Napoli. Produced in the late fourth or early fifth century, the central medallion at the top of the ceiling, situated right above the baptismal font, shows the hand of God placing a triumphant wreath on a golden staurogram,⁹⁶ an image reminiscent of the hand of God on the early fifth-century *solidi* of the Theodosian empresses. While such central mosaics in later baptisteries in Ravenna feature the figural representation of Jesus Christ, the triumphant Christ in the baptistery in Napoli was revealed to Christian neophytes through a graphic sign reminiscent of Crucifixion and Salvation: a crowned staurogram flanked by an alpha and omega.

In the baptistery of Albenga in northern Italy, variously dated to the period between the early fifth and early sixth centuries, the Christian divinity is identified by a triple chi-rho accompanied by alphas and omegas within three circles,⁹⁷ emphasizing the Trinitarian unity of Christ with the other two divine personas (Fig. 2.16). In both mosaics, the golden christograms are set against a blue background marked

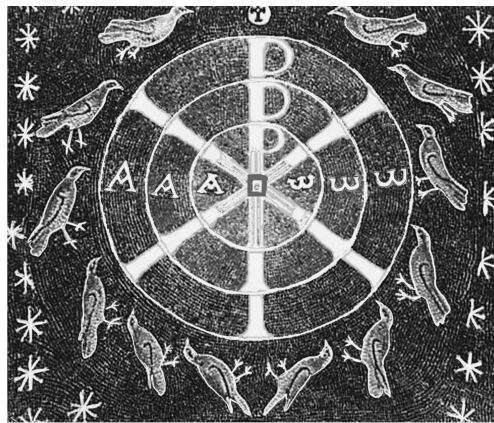


Fig. 2.16. Triple chi-rho from Albenga Baptistry. Graphic drawing.

⁹⁵ *Repertorium der christlich-antiken Sarkophage*, vol. 3.

⁹⁶ Cecchelli, *Il trionfo*, pp. 84–5, fig. 67; Maier, *Le baptistère*, pp. 26–7 and 69–77; Pariset, 'I mosaici'; Sanmori, 'I mosaici', pp. 343–5; Jensen, *Living Water*, pp. 191–4. For the contested dating of the baptistery and its mosaics with relevant bibliography, see Kleinbauer, 'The Iconography', p. 36, note 40. A staurogram within a wreath also appears in the fourth-century Mosaic of the Crown in the Church of the Annunciation in Nazareth: Finegan, *The Archeology*, pp. 50–1.

⁹⁷ Cecchelli, *Il trionfo*, pp. 84–5, fig. 66; Marcenaro, *Il battistero*, pp. 129–91. Twelve doves surround the outer circle, thus representing Christ's apostles; Jensen, *Living Water*, p. 119.

with golden stars, delineating the heavenly sphere in which these graphic signs operated. In both cases, the chi-rho and tau-rho thus functioned as symbolic graphic representations of Christ, whose nature as Logos was described at the beginning of the Gospel of John: 'In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God' (*In principio erat Verbum et Verbum erat apud Deum et Deus erat Verbum*, John, 1.1). If God was Word, hybrid graphic compositions composed of letters and conveying extralinguistic meanings referring to Christological and Trinitarian concepts reflected his divine nature just as well as any figural imagery might. In the Baptistery of Albenga, meanwhile, the triple chi-rho embellishes the ceiling of the niche, the upper interior wall of which shows to visitors the image of the jewelled cross flanked by two sheep, calling to mind the third crucial graphic symbol of divine authority that rose to prominence in the fifth century, namely the sign of the cross.

3

The Sign of the Cross in Late Antiquity

Cruciform signs have had a long and complex history in Europe, the Mediterranean world, and the Near East. The x-shaped cross was already appearing on artefacts and cave drawings produced in Ice Age Europe, where it was displayed side by side with other geometric signs in some form of graphic communication, the nature of which remains subject to debate.¹ The cross sign with equal arms continued to be in use in the ancient world where it could, for example, function as a symbol of good luck or as a symbol of the sun. Through its visual similarity with the last letter of the Hebrew alphabet, tau—which was also the word designating ‘sign’—it had acquired additional symbolic and apotropaic meanings among the ancient Jews and, thereafter, was passed on to early Christians.² Yet within Christian usage, this symbol developed an inseparable connection to the material medium of Christ’s passion—a historical event that made the Lord’s promise of salvation real to his flock. It is through its prototype that the late antique sign of the cross acquired its emblematic, salvific, and apotropaic functions.

3.1. THE EARLY SYMBOLISM OF THE CROSS AND THE ORIGINS OF THE CULT OF THE HOLY CROSS

As early as the second half of the second and early third centuries, patristic fathers reflected on the symbolic importance of the sign of the cross among early Christians and its perceived power. Indeed, according to St Paul, ‘the word of the cross, to them indeed that perish, is foolishness; but to them that are saved, that is, to us, it is the power of God’ (Corinthians, 1.18). Authors such as Justin Martyr and Tertullian imagined this symbol as a tau cross (*crux commissa*) reminiscent of the Cross of Jesus, and discerned it in various mundane objects. These and later Christian fathers also interpreted various objects and postures described in the Old Testament as symbolic anticipations of the Cross.³ Writing in Carthage at the turn of the third century, Tertullian made it clear that his North African Christian

¹ See von Petzinger, *The First Signs*, especially its introductory table of signs.

² For more details, see Dölger, ‘Beiträge zur Geschichte des Kreuzzeichens II’; Dinkler, ‘Zur Geschichte des Kreuzsymbols’; Dinkler, ‘Kreuzzeichen’; Finegan, *The Archeology*, pp. 339–50. For an overview of the symbol’s early history, see Sulzberger, ‘Le symbole’, pp. 345–93.

³ Dölger, ‘Beiträge zur Geschichte des Kreuzzeichens V’, pp. 5–10. For a full list, see Armstrong, ‘The Cross’, pp. 34–8. For a short overview of early Christian discourse on the sign of the cross, see Longenecker, *The Cross*, pp. 149–61.

compatriots adored the symbol of the cross and even signed their foreheads with it in almost every action of daily life, including liturgical activities. At the same time, Tertullian as well as his near contemporary Minucius Felix, made sure to refute the pagan claim that Christians worshipped the cross.⁴ What is certain is that for early Christians the symbol of the cross drawn by hand or imagined in quotidian objects functioned as an apotropaic sign of salvation and blessing, and many contemporaries already saw it as a distinctive characteristic of early Christians.⁵ This symbolic usage continued in North Africa in the mid-third century, and Bishop Cyprian of Carthage commented on this phenomenon with a statement repeated by many patristic authors in other Roman regions: 'in this sign of the cross is salvation to all those who are marked [with it] on their foreheads.'⁶ Furthermore, from the times of Origen and Tertullian, catechumens signed their foreheads with the symbol of the cross, and by the fifth century, this practice had become widespread across the Roman empire.⁷ This crossing gesture functioned as an apotropaic seal of Christ marking one's religious identity and affiliation, a usage not very different from the application of the baptismal seals in the *Books of Jeu* discussed earlier on in this monograph.

Furthermore, as mentioned in Chapter 1, the last letter of the Hebrew alphabet, tau, was drawn in antique and late antique periods, first in the form of a standing cross with equal arms, known to modern scholars as the Greek cross (*crux quadrata*, +), and later as a cross lying on its side (*crux decussata*, x). It was the latter sign that, according to the Hebrew text of the Old Testament (Ezekiel 9. 4), the Lord ordered to be inscribed on the foreheads of his chosen people, and in Jewish cosmology this graphic character encapsulated the cosmic power of God similar to the perceived powers of 'magical' *charactères*. This cosmic staurology was known to early Christian apologists such as Justin Martyr as well as some gnostic groups,⁸ but Greek-speaking Christians could also see the equal-armed cross as representing the first Greek letter of Christ's name, chi, and thus directly referring to the Messiah himself. From the second half of the fourth century onwards, the latter referential meaning also contributed to the frequent use in the Roman world of monogrammatic crosses (also known as tau-rhos), which combined the graphic structure of the salvific sign with the first two letters of Christ's name.⁹

As a powerful seal of God, the sign of the equal-armed cross first appeared in the Roman East, and was inscribed in and around Jerusalem, for instance, on several

⁴ Tertullian, *Apology*, 16, p. 31; Tertullian, *The Chaplet, or de corona*, 3, pp. 94–5. For further details and references, see Dölger, 'Beiträge zur Geschichte des Kreuzzeichens I'; Hurtado, 'Earliest Christian Graphix Symbols', pp. 34–5. The usage described by Tertullian was also referred to by Christian authors in other provinces of the Roman empire; see Dölger, 'Beiträge zur Geschichte des Kreuzzeichens VIII', pp. 7–13 and 28–34;

⁵ '...et qui crucis nos religiosos putat' Tertullian, *Apologeticus adversus Gentes pro Christianis*, 16, cols 365–6. See also Viladesau, *The Beauty of the Cross*, p. 7.

⁶ 'Quod in hoc signo crucis salus sit omnibus qui in frontibus notentur', Cyprian, *Testimoniorum libri tres adversus Judeos*, 2. 22, col. 716.

⁷ Dölger, 'Beiträge zur Geschichte des Kreuzzeichens IV'.

⁸ For more detailed discussion, see Heid, *Kreuz*, pp. 13–60 and 67–8.

⁹ Dölger, 'Beiträge zur Geschichte des Kreuzzeichens III'; Finegan, *The Archeology*, pp. 350–2; see also Chapter 2.

Jewish ossuaries dated to around the first century BC and first century AD and, in the following centuries, on ossuaries associated with early Christian converts residing in that area.¹⁰ By the third century, the use of the latter graphic sign had already reached Rome where its different forms—including another ancient form of the cross, the so-called *crux gammata* (swastika)—appeared on a few funerary plaques in early Roman catacombs.¹¹ Cyprian's contemporary, Novatian, confirms that, by the mid-third century, the sign of the equal-armed cross was perceived in Rome as a form of the *signum crucis*, while interpreting the crossed hands of Jacob as signifying Christ as well as 'the figure and the future form of the passion'.¹² The sign of the equal-armed cross could thus function in an early Christian context as a sacred seal identifying both the Lord and his faithful followers chosen for ultimate salvation.

During the fourth century, the visual presence of the sign of the cross with equal arms slightly increased in Roman catacombs. But in the century when Roman emperors abolished shameful punishment by crucifixion,¹³ this sign marked less than 1 per cent of all *tabulae* in this funerary context. Such a low number can be partly explained by the recent argument that, contrary to the rarely challenged assumption of Christian archaeology, third- and, even, fourth-century Roman subterranean cemeteries were used by both Christians and pagans, whose tombs often remain indistinguishable to scholars.¹⁴ This caveat notwithstanding, the number of cross signs still remains too low, and points to their limited usage in fourth-century Roman funerary contexts (Fig. 4.7).¹⁵ This data is noteworthy considering the omnipresence of abstract cruciform ornaments on pavement mosaics in fourth-century Italian churches—for example, in the early fourth-century basilica of Aquileia (Fig. 3.1). The Mausoleum of Augusta Constantina (d. 354) in Rome provides another relevant example.¹⁶ Similar to contemporary Italian churches, Santa Constanza displays various cruciform ornaments on its ceiling mosaics, but no sign of the cross typical of ecclesiastical decorations in fifth-century Rome.

Such limited usage of the sign of the cross in subterranean Rome stands in stark contrast with visual material from the Roman East. The evidence of late antique graveyards at Zoora in Roman Palestine demonstrates that the Greek cross was first carved on their funerary stelae as early as the 340s (in 342/3 and 345), and the

¹⁰ Finegan, *The Archeology*, pp. 356–74; Figueras, *Decorated Jewish Ossuaries*, pp. 22–3; Longenecker, *The Cross*, pp. 49–60. Cf. Houston Smith, 'The Cross Marks'. For the late antique usage of this sign in a Jewish context, see Heid, *Kreuz*, pp. 52–9.

¹¹ Finegan, *The Archeology*, pp. 377–8. See also third-century inscriptions with various cross signs in ICUR, vol. 4, no. 10756a (EDB, no. 38735); ICUR, vol. 7, nos. 20361, 20384, 20432 (EDB, nos. 5503, 9249, 10027); ICUR, vol. 8, no. 21349 (EDB, no. 14730); ICUR, vol. 9, no. 24912 (EDB, no. 12574). For an overview of the appearances of Christian cross signs in the pre-Constantinian era, see Longenecker, *The Cross*, pp. 73–119.

¹² Novatian, *Treatise Concerning Trinity*, 20, p. 631. On Cyprian and Novatian, see Heine, 'Cyprian and Novatian'.

¹³ Granger Cook, 'Crucifixion'.

¹⁴ Bodet, 'From Columbaria to Catacombs'; Denzey Lewis, 'Chapter 12. Reinterpreting "Pagans"'.

¹⁵ A search in EDB shows only 154 plaques featuring *crux* ('cross') out of 20,860 fourth-century recorded inscriptions.

¹⁶ Brandenburg, *Die frühchristlichen Kirchen*, pp. 76–91.



Fig. 3.1. Floor mosaic in the Basilica of Aquileia.

public visibility of this sign in this material medium rapidly increased from the mid-350s onwards, complemented in these decades by the monogrammatic cross (the tau-rho) (Charts 2.6–7). As a result, various cross signs marked the vast majority of grave stones in Zoora's cemeteries in the fifth century and all of them in the sixth (Charts 3.1–2).¹⁷ Thus, the sign of the equal-armed cross clearly was a much more popular visual symbol in fourth-century Palestine than in Italy, which is unsurprising considering its earlier history in that eastern province.¹⁸ After all, as mentioned in the preceding chapter, the centres and arms of many outlined crosses on tombstones in Zoora also frequently featured the *crux decussata* (×), identical with the Hebrew taw, a symbolic character that had been so important in Palestine in the previous centuries.

In the fourth century, the use of this sign was not restricted to Palestine and had spread to neighbouring provinces. For instance, the sign of the equal-armed cross appears on rare gold and silver rings attributed to the mid-fourth century, where it is placed above facing male and female busts.¹⁹ Most of them are inscribed with the names of owners in Greek, which points to the Greek East as the most probable place of origin for most of these seals. Furthermore, the sign of the Greek cross appeared in Christian letters dated to the fourth century from late antique Oxyrhynchus, and its use visibly increased in the following century. In this Egyptian material, the sign

¹⁷ Meimaris and Kritikakou-Nikolaropoulou, *Inscriptions*. For another example from Palestine of the sign of the cross becoming the default Christian symbol on tombstones, see Alt, *Die griechischen Inschriften*.

¹⁸ See also Dinkler, 'Das Kreuz als Siegeszeichen', p. 74.

¹⁹ Spier, *Late Antique and Early Christian Gems*, pp. 23–4, nos. 45, 47, 63.

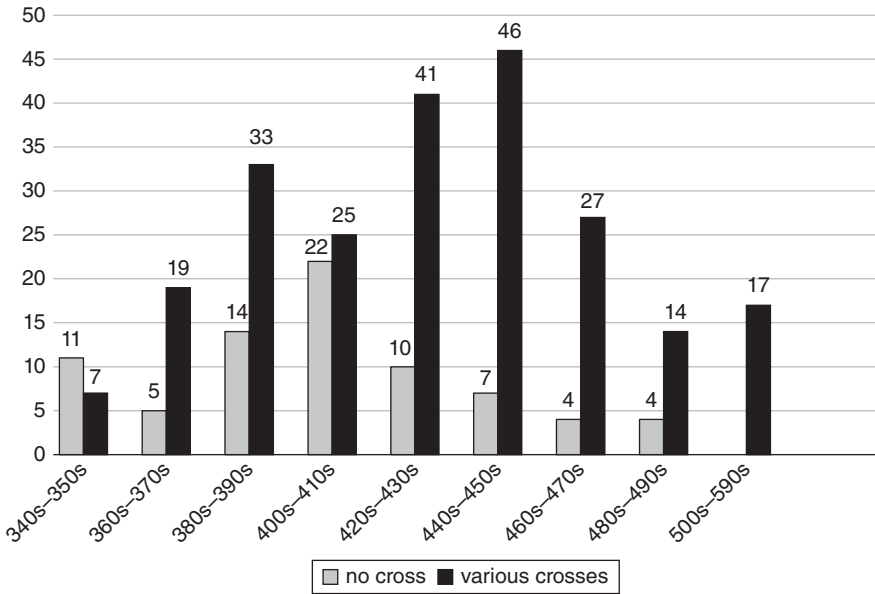


Chart 3.1. The use of crosses on datable late antique funerary inscriptions from Zoora (absolute numbers).

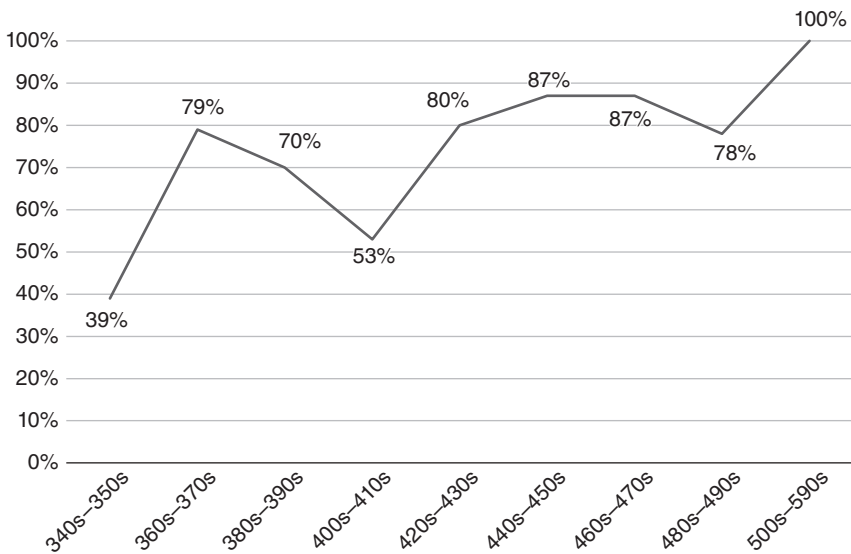


Chart 3.2. The use of crosses on datable late antique funerary inscriptions from Zoora (percentage).

was employed at the beginning of the text as an invocation of Christ and a visual form of blessing to the addressee.²⁰ Finally, cross graffiti can also be traced in fourth-century layers of Greek cities such as Aphrodisias, where they competed in public space with visual symbols of pagan deities.²¹

These different trends in the usage of the sign of the cross between the western and eastern Roman regions can also be mapped in contemporary literary sources, such as Lactantius' and Eusebius of Caesarea's descriptions of Constantine's apotropaic sign delivered to him before the battle of the Milvian Bridge, discussed in the previous chapter. Narrating in Trier in the 310s, Lactantius glorified the apotropaic power of the chi-rho, whereas Eusebius, metropolitan bishop of Palestine, wrote in the late 330s of the celestial vision of the sign of the cross, 'a cross-shaped trophy formed from light'.

At the same time that the sign of the Greek cross was gaining prominence on Christian grave stones in Palestine, people in Jerusalem are said to have twice seen the apparitions of a luminous cross. The first celestial cross was observed on 7 May 351 in the sky stretching from Golgotha to the Mount of Olives, a mount flanking the Temple of Jerusalem.²² Soon thereafter Bishop Cyril of Jerusalem (c.349–86)—in whose theology the Cross of Jesus was of utmost importance—dispatched a letter to Emperor Constantius II with the description of this miraculous occurrence. In this letter, Cyril interpreted the sign as the premonition of the Second Coming and as the trophy of victory delivered by God to Constantine's heir, at that time confronting the usurper Maxentius. Twelve years later, in 363, another vision of a cross of light purportedly took place in Jerusalem after Emperor Julian's failed attempt to restore the Jewish Temple. Written texts inform us that, during this incident, the luminous powerful symbol allegedly symbolizing Christianity's triumph over the Jews not only appeared in the sky but also left marks on the clothes and bodies of people witnessing this marvellous event.²³ Such fourth-century beliefs in the power of luminous crosses were firmly anchored in late antique cosmology where the cross was viewed as the powerful cosmic frame defining heavenly and worldly axes, and in Cyril's mind, the Cross on Golgotha was situated at the middle of the world so that Christ could trace the cross of the world with his crucified body.²⁴

Another work by Cyril, the *Catecheses*, indicates that by the late 340s the material object believed to be the Cross of Jesus was already present in the Church of the Holy Sepulchre built by Constantine the Great at Golgotha (the Martyrium basilica) and over the tomb of Jesus (the Anastasis rotunda), which was consecrated in 335. The wood's authenticity and origin has been a matter of arduous historiographic debate.²⁵ What is certain is that 'wood considered to be the cross of Christ was

²⁰ Ghignoli, 'Writing Texts', pp. 17–18.

²¹ Chaniotis, 'Zwischen Konfrontation und Interaktion'.

²² For the scientific explanation of such celestial apparitions, see Weiss, 'The Vision', pp. 240–5.

²³ Drijvers, 'The Power of the Cross', pp. 241–7.

²⁴ For more details and references, see Heid, *Kreuz*, pp. 71–105.

²⁵ For the arguments of the two opposite interpretations and relevant references, see Borgehammer, *How the Holy Cross*, pp. 85–142; and Heid, 'Der Ursprung'.

discovered, although we do not know how and by whom'.²⁶ The written accounts of that church from the 330s—by Eusebius and the so-called Bordeaux pilgrim—did not mention the wood of the Cross there, which suggests that it was either yet to be discovered or had not acquired liturgical importance. Regardless its origins, Bishop Cyril turned this relic into the focal point of the burgeoning cult, and skilfully employed the growing liturgical veneration of the True Cross in order to increase the authority of his see vis-à-vis the metropolitan bishopric of Caesarea. The rise of this new cult clearly made his bid for ecclesiastical primacy in Palestine successful: he was able to install his nephew Gelasius at the see of Caesarea and was listed before other bishops of that region in the acts of the Council of Constantinople in 382.²⁷ All in all, there seems to have been a direct correspondence between the growing visibility of the sign of the cross in Palestine and elsewhere from the mid-fourth century onwards and the establishment of the cult of the Holy Cross in Jerusalem and the subsequent dissemination of its relics across the late Roman empire. For example, *The Life of St Macrina*, written by Gregory of Nyssa between 380 and 383, mentions that this female saint was in possession of a ring with a gem inscribed with the sign of the cross and encapsulating a relic of the Holy Cross.²⁸

The account of Egeria, a western pilgrim to the Holy Land in the 380s, testifies to the centrality of the wood of the Holy Cross during the liturgy of Good Friday, when this material medium of salvation was taken from a reliquary made of gold and silver and displayed to a weeping audience gathered in the Martyrium. On another occasion, pilgrims worshipped an object referred to as the Cross, which is commonly taken as alluding to a wooden monumental cross installed in the Church of the Holy Sepulchre after the mid-fourth century.²⁹ Jerome's description of another pilgrim, a certain Paula, visiting that church in the 380s is interpreted in a similar vein, since the text states that she threw herself in front of that Cross (*ante Crucem*) and adored it as if she perceived the Lord hanging upon it.³⁰ Yet some scholars doubt the existence of such a monumental cross at this location before the late seventh century; it is possible, they argue, that the two above accounts refer to a portable ceremonial cross standing inside the Martyrium or the reliquary with the wood of the True Cross kept there.³¹ Another liturgical event focused on the Holy Cross and originating from the Church of the Holy Sepulchre became known from the sixth century as the feast of the Exaltation of the Cross (*Exaltatio crucis*); the holy day celebrated the latter's legendary finding on 14 September, the second day of festivities (known as Encaenia) dedicated to the consecration of that

²⁶ Drijvers, 'Helena Augusta', p. 149.

²⁷ Drijvers, 'Promoting Jerusalem', pp. 79–95.

²⁸ *The Life of Saint Macrina*, trans. Corrigan, p. 47. For earlier examples, see Frolow, *La relique*, p. 155.

²⁹ *Egeria's Travels*, 36–7, trans. Wilkinson, pp. 154–7. For a detailed argument for the existence of such a monumental cross, see Heid, *Kreuz*, pp. 221–42.

³⁰ Jerome, *Letters*, pp. 198–9. 'Prostrataque ante Crucem, quasi pendentem Dominum cerneret, adorabat', *Epistolae S. Hieronymi in quattuor classes divisae secundum ordinem temporum*, 108. 9, col. 883.

³¹ For a detailed argument against the cross's existence, see Christine Milner, 'Lignum Vitae'. See also Wood, 'Constantinian Crosses', pp. 8–10, who argues that such literary descriptions are products of imagination on the part of western pilgrims inspired by the jewelled reliquary of the cross in the Martyrium.

Church.³² By Egeria's time, this liturgical feast had already been furnished with its own legend, the so-called Helena legend.

The legend describing the finding of the True Cross most likely originated in the second half of the fourth century and possibly from within social circles close to Cyril of Jerusalem, since its shortest version was first recorded in the *Church History* of his aforementioned nephew, Gelasius of Caesarea, around 390. The legend attributed the leading role in the discovery of the True Cross to the mother of Constantine, Helena, who was known to have visited the eastern Roman provinces, including Palestine, in the 320s.

Within a decade or so, the legend became known among Christian authors in Latin Italy such as Ambrose of Milan, Rufinus of Aquileia, and Paulinus of Nola.³³ The expansion of the cult of the Holy Cross to the west around the turn of the fifth century also affected the public memory of Constantine's miraculous sign. When Rufinus of Aquileia wrote a modified Latin translation of Eusebius' *Ecclesiastical History* c.402, he projected the changing visual symbolism of his age onto the description of events in 312. Consequently, he augmented Eusebius' text with a passage on Constantine's vision before the battle of Milvian Bridge. According to Rufinus, Constantine saw in the fiery sky not the chi-rho but the sign of the cross ('*in caelo signum crucis igneo*'). Consequently, the emperor entered the battle under cross-shaped military standards, whilst allegedly carrying a gold material symbol of that cross ('*signum nihilominus crucis ex auro fabrefactum*') in his right hand.³⁴ The latter element is reminiscent of the image of Victoria holding a jewelled cross in her right hand that appeared on imperial solidi in 420 (Fig. 3.2). The sign of the cross thus began to be seen as an appropriate symbol for a triumphant Christian emperor.



Fig. 3.2. Solidus of Theodosius II (Constantinople, 420–2). Princeton University Numismatic Collection, Department of Rare Books and Special Collections, Firestone Library.

³² van Tongeren, *Exaltation of the Cross*, pp. 17–40.

³³ de Blaauw, 'Jerusalem in Rome', pp. 63–4.

³⁴ Rufinus, *Historia Ecclesiastica*, 9, 9, ed. Mommsen, pp. 827–9; Cecchelli, *Il trionfo*, pp. 81–2; van Dam, *Remembering Constantine*, pp. 44–7. On the reworking of Eusebius' narrative in Rufinus' translation, see Humphries, 'Rufinus's Eusebius'.

The burgeoning veneration of the Holy Cross resulted in several longer versions of its legend appearing in the fifth and sixth centuries; they saturated the main narrative plot with new details. Among these longer texts, the Judas Kyriakos legend composed between 415 and the 440s, probably in Jerusalem, became the most popular version during the Middle Ages. Translated into Latin, this *Inventio crucis* narrative provided an impetus for a Latin feast of the Invention of the Cross on 3 May, which was celebrated in Rome as early as the sixth century.³⁵

3.2. THE SIGN OF THE CROSS AS A LATE ANTIQUUE SYMBOL OF AUTHORITY

As the Helena legend has highlighted, from early on, the cult of the Holy Cross claimed an intimate connection with imperial authority. Moreover, chronologically, the textual transmission of this legend corresponded strikingly to the pious activities of Theodosian empresses in Constantinople. Indeed, the legend provided them with an appealing textual model of exemplary Christian queenship. It was known that Helena became Augusta prior to her trip to the East, and the wife of Theodosius I, Aelia Flaccilla, was elevated to the same imperial dignity as Helena, a practice followed by other female members of the Theodosian imperial house in the first half of the fifth century. The Helena legend must have been known at the Theodosian court in Constantinople, and the empresses of the new imperial dynasty strived to emulate the pious image of Constantine the Great's renowned mother.³⁶ As such, Christian piety was perceived as an attribute securing divine sanction for the Theodosian imperial house, and its empresses were expected to perform this virtue in public space.³⁷ The sign of the cross played an important visual role in this process of symbolic emulation.

The gold and silver coinage issued in the name of the Theodosian empresses in the early fifth century exemplifies this point. When Aelia Eudoxia, wife of Arcadius, became Augusta in 400, the mint of Constantinople issued tremisses and siliquae in her name featuring a reverse type entirely new for Roman coinage, specifically the sign of the cross within a laurel wreath. This numismatic practice was continued in the following decades when Aelia Pulcheria and Aelia Eudocia, respectively sister and wife of Theodosius II, were elevated to the same imperial status in 414 and 423 (Fig. 2.12).³⁸ The shape of this sign, the standing Latin cross with a longer descending arm, might have imitated the cross erected in the Church of the Holy Sepulchre. Furthermore, c.403–8 this numismatic type was transferred to the lowest denomination of bronze coinage (Ae4) issued in the name of Emperor Arcadius, and thereafter the sign of the Latin cross framed by a laurel wreath became a popular

³⁵ Borgehammer, *How the Holy Cross*, pp. 7–81, 145–95; Drijvers, *Helena Augusta*, pp. 165–80, Drijvers, 'Helena Augusta', pp. 151–67.

³⁶ Drijvers, *Helena Augusta*, pp. 123–4.

³⁷ For more details, see Holum, *Theodosian Empresses*.

³⁸ RIC, vol. 10, nos 21, 50, 214, 252–3, 280–1, 383–4, and 387–8.



Fig. 3.3. Nummus of Theodosius II, Ae4 (Antioch, 408–50). Oslo University, Museum of Cultural History.

reverse type on the copper-alloy coinage of Theodosius II (408–50) (Fig. 3.3),³⁹ thus addressing the vast majority of their subjects in the Eastern Roman empire and sometimes influencing their artistic preferences. For example, several surviving gems carved for fifth-century rings display an identical motif of a standing Latin cross framed by a triumphant wreath.⁴⁰

Even before the sign of the Latin cross was introduced onto Theodosian imperial coinage, it acquired a more prominent symbolic presence in the public image of the Theodosian dynasty in Constantinople. A carved Latin cross can still be seen on a pier of the late fourth-century Arch of Theodosius in the Forum Tauri. As mentioned in the previous chapter, this sign also featured prominently on the Golden Gate built around the turn of the fifth century and on the column of Arcadius erected c.402/3.⁴¹ This visual symbolism of the Theodosian dynasty was not vastly different from the aspirations of its Christian subjects. In a similar spirit, Christians reclaimed public spaces by carving and scratching crosses and cross graffiti onto various classical monuments and sculptures in the eastern Roman cities from the late fourth century onwards.⁴² The sign of the cross became even more visible inside eastern churches: for instance, the Syrian city of Antioch featured the cruciform martyrion of St Babylas erected c.379. Its pavements created in the period of 381–404 were representative of a contemporary trend in decorative mosaics, whereby classical representational and symbolic imagery were replaced with abstract designs, including cross signs. In St Babylas, this graphic symbol appeared in its eastern arm, which was the original path toward its most holy place, the shrine of the saint.⁴³ This ecclesiastical building was not exceptional in its pavement decorations, considering that the sign of the cross dominated the visual

³⁹ Grierson and Mays, eds, *Catalogue*, pp. 140–2, and nos 253, 257, 261–2, 333–8, 341–5; RIC, vol. 10, nos 106–41, 440–55.

⁴⁰ Spier, *Late Antique and Early Christian Gems*, pp. 75 and 89, nos 448–50 and 515.

⁴¹ Crow, 'Blessing or Security?', pp. 152–3, fig. 5.3.

⁴² For further details and references, see Jacobs, 'Cross Graffiti', pp. 177–81 and 192–214.

⁴³ Kitzinger, 'The Threshold', pp. 639–40.

programmes of floor mosaics in Syrian and Palestinian churches from the late fourth to seventh centuries.⁴⁴

In addition to the appropriation of the cross sign on her coinage, Aelia Eudoxia was also credited with providing silver candlesticks in the shape of portable crosses for Orthodox liturgical processions competing with similar Arian arrangements across the imperial capital on Saturdays, Sundays, and festal days.⁴⁵ It is also noteworthy that Augusta Eudoxia actively employed the symbol of the Cross in her public propaganda in the context of her long-lasting dispute with John Chrysostom, bishop of Constantinople from 398 to 404, who felt uneasy about active female involvement in ecclesiastical matters. Bolstered by the example of Helena, Eudoxia prevailed in this conflict resulting in the exile of John Chrysostom,⁴⁶ thus establishing a viable path of effective participation in ecclesiastical matters for the subsequent Theodosian empresses.

Parallel to the sign of the cross acquiring a higher visibility in imperial media in Constantinople from the turn of the fifth century, the veneration of the Cross of Golgotha as the sign of the Lord's power developed new and luxurious forms appropriate for higher lay and ecclesiastical authorities. A ninth-century Byzantine narrator, Theophanes, stated that, influenced by his elder sister Pulcheria, Theodosius II sent a golden cross embellished with jewels to Jerusalem c.420–1, to be erected on Golgotha.⁴⁷ If true, this story highlights the fact that Theodosius II held the sign of the cross in high esteem—an attitude also illustrated by another story alleging that the emperor himself once copied a Bible where the lines of letters on each page were arranged in a cross shape.⁴⁸

The veracity of Theophanes' story remains contested, but it may reflect the fact that, by the early fifth century, the wooden monumental cross in the Church of the Holy Sepulchre might have been replaced with a cross similar to the one later ascribed to Theodosius II. Furthermore, in the fifth and sixth centuries, it had become customary among figures of authority to furnish reliquaries of the fragments of the True Cross that were disseminated across the Mediterranean world with gold and jewels. Such precious reliquaries were often made in a cruciform shape, like the famous Cross of Justin II that this Byzantine emperor (565–74) sent as a gift to papal Rome.⁴⁹

Reliquaries of this kind as well as the direct and indirect knowledge of the monumental cross on Golgotha might have inspired the depictions of the jewelled cross, *crux gemmata*, that appeared in fifth- and sixth-century apse mosaics in many eastern and western churches. The apse mosaic in the Church of Santa Pudenziana, produced during the pontificate of Innocent I (402–17), provides the earliest

⁴⁴ Tchalenko and Baccache, *Églises de village*; Hachlili, *Ancient Mosaic Pavements*, pp. 224–5.

⁴⁵ Socrates Scholasticus, *The Ecclesiastical History*, 6. 9, trans. Zenos, p. 144.

⁴⁶ Harries, "Men without Women", p. 88. For further details and references, see Holum, *Theodosian Empresses*, pp. 54–77.

⁴⁷ See Holum, *Theodosian Empresses*, pp. 103–9, who accepts this account.

⁴⁸ It has been argued that this Bible was displayed in fourteenth-century Constantinople: Momigliano, 'Popular Religious Beliefs', p. 152.

⁴⁹ Milner, "Lignum Vitae", pp. 83–90. On early reliquaries of the fragments of the True Cross, see Frolov, *Les reliquaires*, pp. 173–7. On the Cross of Justin II, see Elbern, 'Zum Justinuskreuz'.

example in Rome.⁵⁰ The mosaic displays the image of the enthroned Jesus in the scene of the Last Supper. Above Jesus appears a monumental jewelled cross on a mount flanked by the four beasts of the Apocalypse in the sky, visual motifs most likely symbolizing the salvific power of the True Cross at the end of the world.⁵¹ Whereas the monumental cross in the Church of the Holy Sepulchre was the most likely source of inspiration for the *crux gemmata* in Santa Pudenziana, a reliquary of the True Cross was a more probable prototype for a *crux gemmata* on the mosaic of the triumphal arch in another Roman church, Santa Maria Maggiore, produced during the pontificate of Sixtus III (432–40).⁵² The upper centre of this arch facing the nave features an enthroned jewelled cross flanked by the same four beasts as on the mosaic in Santa Pudenziana, whilst a scroll with the seven seals of Revelation is displayed below and a chi-rho and an alpha and omega further underneath (Fig. 3.4). As a visual promise of salvation, a golden Latin cross could also be depicted with the visual motifs symbolizing heaven on its background, namely blue skies and golden stars. Such composition appears on the mosaics of the central dome in the Mausoleum of Galla Placidia in Ravenna, with the four beasts of the apocalypse in its corners (Fig. 3.5), and in the Church of St Mary in Casaranello in Puglia, both originating from the first half of the fifth century.⁵³ Later on, these various iconographic settings in the visual representations of the *crux gemmata* could also be freely combined for new symbolic messages, as in the sixth-century apse mosaic in the Church of Sant'Apollinare in Classe. The latter mosaic displays St Apollinaris of Ravenna, imitating the cross with his posture, beneath the scene of the Transfiguration of Jesus: the jewelled cross in a blue medallion with golden stars, with an enface bust of Jesus at its middle, is identified as *salus mundi* ('the salvation of the world') beneath and as *IXΘΥΣ* (the backronym for 'Jesus Christ, Son of God, Saviour') above—thus making the two meanings of the shining cross more apparent to its viewers.

The early history of the *crux gemmata* in church mosaics clearly demonstrates that, by the mid-fifth century, the sign of the Latin cross associated with the Cross of Golgotha became an important symbol of divine authority within religious art. At the same time, Eastern and Western Roman emperors were appropriating this sign as the principal imperial symbol of Christian emperorship. Thus, for instance, the description of Emperor Leo I's coronation in 457, preserved in the later *Book of Ceremonies*, makes it clear that fixed and portable crosses played an important symbolic role in this imperial ritual.⁵⁴ Furthermore, by the mid-fifth century, the numismatic reverse type of the sign of the cross inside a laurel wreath was brought from base-metal to gold coinage issued in the name of male rulers and, for example, appears on the tremisses of the Western Roman emperors Valentinian III (425–55) and Anthemius (467–72) (Fig. 3.6). This connection between the sign of the cross

⁵⁰ Schlatter, 'The Text'; Brandenburg, *Die frühchristlichen Kirchen*, pp. 145–51.

⁵¹ Heid, *Kreuz*, pp. 176–88. Cf. Milner, 'Lignum Vitae', pp. 91–4.

⁵² Brandenburg, *Die frühchristlichen Kirchen*, pp. 195–208.

⁵³ Cecchelli, *Il trionfo*, pp. 85–6; Castelfranchi, *Pittura monumentale*, pp. 21–2.

⁵⁴ Constantine Porphyrogenitos, *The Book of Ceremonies*, 1. 91, trans. Moffatt and Tall, vol. 1, p. 414. For further details and references, see Cotsonis, *Byzantine Processional Crosses*, p. 9.



Fig. 3.4. Upper central side of the triumphal arch in Santa Maria Maggiore, Rome.



Fig. 3.5. Central dome of the Mausoleum of Galla Placidia, Ravenna.



Fig. 3.6. Tremissis of Anthemius (Milan or Rome, 467–72). Oslo University, Museum of Cultural History.

and imperial authority is further exemplified by gold crossbow brooches of Type 7 produced in the second half of the fifth and the early sixth centuries. These brooches differed from earlier types in that they featured large Latin or monogrammatic crosses as part of their visual designs (Fig. 3.7). Such distinctive



Fig. 3.7. Gold crossbow brooch, second half of the fifth century. New York, MMA, acc. no. 1995.97.

cloak fasteners were crafted for high-status imperial dignitaries, and their large size and prominent location on the bodies of their wearers turned their cruciform symbols into visible tokens of imperial authority for anyone who saw or encountered the officials wearing them.⁵⁵

This symbolic usage of the cross sign on various material artefacts had increased by the sixth century, when it was displayed across the Mediterranean Christian world, on public monuments, on mass-produced objects from base metals, and on various luxurious objects—such as silver dishes or jewellery (Fig. 3.8).⁵⁶ A homily once ascribed to John Chrysostom, but probably reflecting the early Byzantine visual landscape, encapsulated this triumphant march of the sign of the cross by stating that, at that time, it could be seen celebrated everywhere, ‘in houses, in marketplaces, in deserts, in streets, on mountains, in valleys, in hills . . . , on clothes, on weapons, . . . on silverware, on objects in gold, in pearls, in wall painting . . .’.⁵⁷

⁵⁵ Eger, ‘Between Amuletic Ornament’, pp. 308–12.

⁵⁶ For the ubiquitous presence of the cross sign on early Byzantine silver dishes, see Leader-Newby, *Silver and Society*, pp. 80–90. For sixth- and seventh-century examples, see nos. 5, 25, 28–9, 32, 36, 40–2, 45–6, 51–5, 67–8, 73, 76, 91–2, 98–9.

⁵⁷ Cited in Maguire, Maguire, and Duncan-Flowers, *Art and Holy*, p. 18.



Fig. 3.8. Early Frankish ring with a cross, c.450–525. New York, MMA, acc. no. 17.192.229.

The paramount importance of the sign of the cross in sixth-century visual culture is also exemplified by a particular iconographic modification: a scene of St Peter and St Paul adoring the Latin cross, referring to the Cross of Golgotha, appeared on objects of Palestinian art in the sixth and seventh centuries. This scene was similar to an iconographic composition popular in Rome in the second half of the fourth century. Yet on the earlier prototype, St Peter and St Paul flanked not a cross but a chi-rho surmounted on a column.⁵⁸

In the same period, the cross sign affected not only Christians' social body, namely their dress and dress accessories, but also transformed their visual forms of self-identification, namely signatures on private charters. From the late fifth century onwards, this sign became the primary form of signature in the early Byzantine East and Latin West.⁵⁹ By the sixth century, the cross sign also became an established feature of manuscript culture. Thus, along with the dissemination of the relics of the True Cross in fifth-century Italy, the sign of the cross began to decorate the sumptuous front covers of Italian gospel-books, as exemplified by a fifth-century mosaic in the Catacombs of San Gennaro in Naples showing a bishop holding a book, the front side of which is embellished with the sign of the cross and the four evangelist symbols between its arms.⁶⁰ This depiction finds a slightly later material parallel in the renowned cruciform gold covers that the Lombard Queen Theodelinda provided for a gospel-book donated to a church in Monza around the turn of the seventh century.⁶¹

In the sixth century, the symbol of the cross affected other forms of late antique graphicacy. Thus, in the early sixth century, the cruciform design influenced the structure of late antique monograms, resulting in the appearance of cruciform monogrammatic devices across various material media in early Byzantium.⁶²

⁵⁸ Noga-Banai, 'Between Rome and Jerusalem'.

⁵⁹ Garipzanov, 'Metamorphoses', 422–3; Ghignoli, 'Writing Texts', pp. 20–3.

⁶⁰ Nees, 'A Fifth-Century Book Cover', pp. 4–6. For further details on the use of the cross sign in Latin manuscript culture from the fifth century onwards, see Chapter 7.

⁶¹ For more details and references, see Ganz, 'The Cross', pp. 252–8.

⁶² This topic is discussed in the following chapters.

Later in that century, the Merovingian Christian poet Venantius Fortunatus employed the sign of the cross as the main structural principle in his *carmina figurata*, thus shaping the classical genre of visual poetry with the Christian form that became most popular in early medieval Western Europe.⁶³ Fortunatus' choice was not accidental, considering that he also wrote cross hymns for the liturgical procession dedicated to the arrival of a relic of the True Cross to Poitiers in 569.⁶⁴

The growing importance of the sign of the cross in early Byzantium in the course of the sixth century was highlighted by the imperial coinage of Tiberius II (578–82). During his reign, a form of the Latin cross, which numismatists often call cross potent, replaced the figural image of the standing angel as the main reverse type on the most prestigious metal, gold. A simple cross appears on tremisses, whereas a Latin cross on a globe and a Latin cross on steps were displayed respectively on his semisses and solidi. The latter form of the cross is thought to have represented the monumental cross on Golgotha.⁶⁵ According to John of Ephesus, Tiberius was dictated to modify his coinage in a dream as a public profession of his Christian persuasion. Of course, the story might be a literary invention, but it at least suggests that in the eyes of bystanders the emperor was seen as the protagonist of the new coin design.⁶⁶ The new reverse types were discontinued during the reigns of Maurice (582–602) and Phocas (602–10). But from the reign of Heraclius (610–41) onwards, the standing Latin cross became the default reverse type of Byzantine gold coinage (Figs 3.9–10). Whilst eparch of Carthage, Heraclius revolted against the imperial usurper Phocas, and the restoration of the cross type after his elevation to the imperial



Fig. 3.9. Solidus of Heraclius (Constantinople, 638–41). Princeton University Numismatic Collection, Department of Rare Books and Special Collections, Firestone Library.

⁶³ Ernst, *Carmen figuratum*, pp. 149–57. See also Pelteret, 'A Cross', pp. 56–7.

⁶⁴ van Tongeren, *Exaltation of the Cross*, pp. 229–47.

⁶⁵ CBC, vol. 1, pp. 266–9; vol. 2, pp. 94–9.

⁶⁶ John Bishop of Ephesus, *The Third Part of the Ecclesiastical History*, 3. 14, trans. Smith, p. 192; Morrisson, 'Displaying the Emperor's Authority', pp. 71–3.



Fig. 3.10. Tremissis of Heraclius (Byzantine *Spania*, 610–21). Oslo University, Museum of Cultural History.

throne not only highlighted the rupture with the overthrown emperor but also visualized a symbolic claim to legitimate connection with the Justinian dynasty.⁶⁷

The history of the True Cross during the reign of Heraclius made its numismatic symbol even more meaningful to coin users. The relic of the True Cross was plundered during the Persian capture of Jerusalem in 614, and Heraclius recovered and reinstalled it in Jerusalem in 631. Because of an imminent Muslim threat to that city later in the 630s, the relic was transferred to Constantinople, which gave a strong impetus for the dissemination of the feast of the Exaltation of the Cross within early Byzantium. The feast now celebrated both the finding of the Cross by Helena and its recovery by Heraclius, and by the mid-seventh century this feast on 14 September was already celebrated in Rome and, later on, in the British Isles and in Gaul. This rising cult of the Holy Cross and the related spread of its relics in pre-Carolingian Europe further enhanced the symbolic significance of the sign of the cross in the public consciousness.⁶⁸

The magnificent Constantinopolitan church of Hagia Sophia that Emperor Justinian I rebuilt in 532–7 exemplified the preeminent importance of this graphic symbol in contemporary religious art. The sign of the cross functioned as the principal decorative element in the visual programme of this as well as other sixth-century churches. Its ubiquitous presence in this splendid church, built as an assertive manifestation of Justinian's imperial prowess, exemplifies the early medieval trend whereby earthly rulers appropriated this Christian symbol to visualize their claim to authority—an authority that was sanctioned and protected by the Divine Lord. Yet as the church's sixth-century admirer, Paul Silentiary, made clear, Justinian's contemporaries saw the cross sign on its dome mosaic not only as a graphic symbol of the Lord, but also as a form of protection for Hagia Sophia itself and the imperial

⁶⁷ On the calculated diversion of Heraclius' coins from those of his predecessor, see Penna and Morrisson, 'Usurpers and Rebels', pp. 25–7.

⁶⁸ van Tongeren, *Exaltation of the Cross*, pp. 34–122. For further discussion, see Chapter 7.

capital in general.⁶⁹ The latter point brings us to the apotropaic function that this graphic symbol fulfilled during late antiquity.

3.3. THE APOTROPAIC POWER OF THE SIGN OF THE CROSS IN LATE ANTIQUITY

From the second half of the fourth century, when the cross sign became a prominent graphic symbol on tombstones in Palestine, many Christians in the eastern Roman provinces invested it with apotropaic and healing powers. These powers derived from the symbol's ultimate prototype, and, according to the Helena legend, the Cross of Jesus was identified among three crosses found near the Holy Sepulchre precisely through its healing properties. Furthermore, in the late antique Eastern Mediterranean world, Christian bishops, writers, and religious men and women imagined demons as the primary spiritual adversaries looming large around pagan temples and elsewhere,⁷⁰ and as early as the mid-fourth century Cyril of Jerusalem and Athanasius of Alexandria claimed that the sign of the cross was an efficient weapon against these vile opponents.⁷¹ In Athanasius' *Life of St Anthony*, the Egyptian hermit repeatedly employed the cross sign to scare away such threatening spiritual combatants, and even stated that this sign made any magic 'powerless and sorcery ineffectual'.⁷² According to the hagiographic text of Gregory of Nyssa written in the 380s, another early saint, St Macrina, wore not only a ring with a relic of the True Cross but also an iron cross—both objects, suspended on a chain hanging around her neck, functioned as protective talismans. The latter object exemplifies the commencement of an enduring tradition of pendant-crosses (Fig. 3.11), which became extremely popular in the early Middle Ages, not only as apotropaic devices, but also as outward, material manifestations of Christian identity.⁷³ Furthermore, in her alleged prayer, St Macrina described the sign of the Holy Cross as the Lord's protective token against various supernatural foes,⁷⁴ and John Chrysostom addressed his liturgical audience in late fourth-century Antioch in a similar style. In his philippic against Jewish 'magical' practices, he encouraged Christians to trust, instead, in the sign of the cross and use it as a healing device as well as a phylactery against demons.⁷⁵ The statements of Cyril, Athanasius, and John were representative of their age, and belief in the apotropaic power of the cross sign against such hostile spiritual forces accounts for many cross graffiti appearing

⁶⁹ Mango, ed., *The Art of the Byzantine Empire*, p. 83.

⁷⁰ For additional details and references, see Wiśniewski, 'Pagan Temples'.

⁷¹ For further details and references, see Dölger, 'Beiträge zur Geschichte des Kreuzzeichens VI', pp. 13–14 and 25–30.

⁷² Athanasius, *The Life of Saint Anthony*, 35 and 78, trans. Meyer, pp. 49 and 84.

⁷³ Dölger, 'Beiträge zur Geschichte des Kreuzzeichens VIII', pp. 34–7.

⁷⁴ *The Life of Saint Macrina*, trans. Corrigan, pp. 41 and 47.

⁷⁵ John Chrysostom, *Homilies to the Colossians*, 8.5, p. 298; Wilken, *John Chrysostom*, pp. 83–5. On the healing power of the cross sign in late antiquity, see Dölger, 'Beiträge zur Geschichte des Kreuzzeichens VII', pp. 5–12.

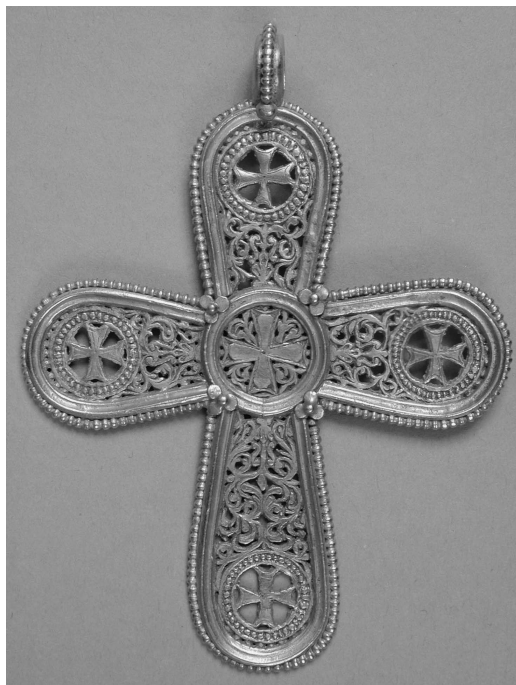


Fig. 3.11. Early Byzantine gold pendant-cross. New York, MMA, acc. no. 2006.569.

in the cityscape of the Eastern Mediterranean world, especially in the fifth and sixth centuries.⁷⁶

Such practices, as well as the growing veneration of the sign of the cross in the reign of Theodosius II (408–50), probably resulted in the prescript against the profanation of this symbol that Theodosius II addressed to the praetorian prefect Eudoxius in 427. This imperial law prohibited the practice of inscribing or painting the sign of the cross directly on the ground, or on stone or marble placed on the ground.⁷⁷ This ban was repeated several times thereafter, including at the Council of Trullo (692), but the existing evidence of pavement mosaics indicates that this regulation was not followed diligently in the late Roman and early Byzantine worlds.⁷⁸ The apotropaic use of signs of the cross over and above the ground seems to have been a less controversial affair. In the fifth and sixth centuries, they frequently appear in the eastern provinces on various monuments such as city gates, aqueduct bridges, and so on, with the purpose of reinforcing such constructions against

⁷⁶ Jacobs, 'Cross Graffiti', pp. 186–92; Dölger, 'Beiträge zur Geschichte des Kreuzzeichens VII', pp. 23–34.

⁷⁷ 'signum salvatoris christi nemini licere vel in solo vel in silice vel in marmoribus humi positum insculpere vel pingere' *Codex Iustinianus*, 1.8.1, ed. Krueger, p. 89.

⁷⁸ Tzaferis, 'Early Christian Churches', p. 285; Hachlili, *Ancient Mosaic Pavements*, pp. 224–6.



Fig. 3.12. Mould for an ankh amulet from the reign of Amenhotep III (c.1390–53 BC). New York, MMA, acc. no. 11.215.711.

hostile forces or earthquakes.⁷⁹ Conforming again to the same apotropaic function, the sign of the cross appeared on jewellery such as earrings, buckles, rings, and cloths, and was stamped on various mass-produced objects.⁸⁰

In this function, this graphic symbol was similar to other protective signs appropriated by Christians in late antiquity, such as Solomon's knot or the ankh symbol. The Egyptian symbol of life, the ankh, was depicted in sacred settings as a divine sign, and it was frequently employed as an apotropaic symbol on various ancient amulets (Fig. 3.12). Yet, because of its specific meaning and visual similarity to the tau-cross and staurogram, this symbol was seen by Christians in Egypt as a form of the cross. As such, the ankh-cross (*crux ansata*), as it has been termed since the nineteenth century, was appropriated in Christian visual culture in Egypt and was occasionally displayed on artefacts produced in other late antique Roman provinces. According to the written accounts of Rufinus, Socrates Scholasticus, and Sozomenus composed in the first half of the fifth century, Christians were already interpreting this ancient symbol of eternal life as the sign of the cross by the time of the destruction of the Temple of Serapis in Alexandria in 390. These narrators also stated that, due to the similarity of this hieroglyph to the Christian cross sign, many priests and servants of the temple decided to convert to Christianity.⁸¹ This narrative spin was probably added to the story for dramatic effect. Yet the uninterrupted use of the more familiar ancient symbol might certainly have made a transition from pre-Christian to Christian visual culture much easier for some locals. Material evidence indicates, meanwhile, that this symbol was appropriated by Christians in Egypt by the early fourth century, and from that time onwards, the ankh-cross began to appear frequently on various Coptic artefacts such as

⁷⁹ Ćurčić, 'Design', pp. 18–20; Jacobs, 'Gates', pp. 202–5 and 209; Crow, 'Blessing or Security?', pp. 167–70.

⁸⁰ For further details and examples, see Maguire, Maguire, and Duncan-Flowers, *Art and Holy*, pp. 18–21.

⁸¹ For further details, see Cramer, *Das altägyptische Lebenszeichen*, pp. 5–7.



Fig. 3.13. Funerary stela with an ankh-cross from Akhmim, Egypt. New York, MMA, acc. no 10.176.29.

funerary stelae (Fig. 3.13), textiles, the walls of monasteries and churches, papyri, and manuscripts, often in combination with the chi-rho, Greek cross, or staurogram (Fig. 3.14).⁸² In later Coptic manuscripts such as the fifth- or sixth-century Glazier Codex,⁸³ the ankh-cross is even depicted as a full-page image, flanked by peacocks and other birds, that is, in the function reserved in contemporary Christian manuscript culture in the Latin West for the sign of the cross or monogrammatic cross.⁸⁴ By the late fourth century, the ankh-cross had been appropriated in late Roman imperial art and appears, for example, on the encolpion of the Western

⁸² Cramer, *Das altägyptische Lebenszeichen*, pp. 7–52; Finegan, *The Archeology*, pp. 382–9; Bardill, *Constantine*, pp. 166–8.

⁸³ New York, ML, Ms. G. 67, p. 215. Its binding was radiocarbon dated to 420–598; see Sharpe, ‘The Earliest Bindings’, p. 383, note 13.

⁸⁴ For further details, see Chapter 7.

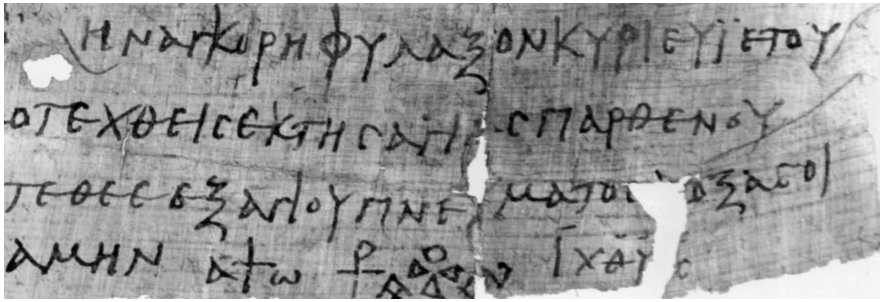


Fig. 3.14. Late antique textual amulet from Egypt, fourth or fifth century, P.Oslo I 5. Courtesy of the University of Oslo Library Papyrus Collection.

Roman empress Maria (Fig. 2.15) or on the imperial porphyry sarcophagus in Constantinople, currently kept in the atrium of Hagia Irene.⁸⁵ In both cases, this symbol was combined with the chi-rho, which thus corroborated the ankh's Christian meaning for its viewer or audience.

Solomon's knot, another graphic symbol with ancient roots, was a popular ornamental motif on Roman pavement mosaics in the Early Imperial period. In late antiquity, it became one of the most frequently used ornamental motifs used on floor mosaics in Jewish synagogues and Christian churches. In the latter material context, Solomon's knot appeared alongside ornamental crosses (Fig. 3.1), and must have been invested with apotropaic resonances not unlike the sign of the cross.⁸⁶ The frequent usage of Solomon's knot in the late antique East was probably also encouraged by the growing popularity of the Solomonic magical tradition in areas such as Syria and Palestine, where bronze amulets with the figure of Solomon often under his Christian alias, St Sisinius, became popular in the sixth century. On these amulets, Solomon or St Sisinius is portrayed combating a demonic figure (Fig. 1.8a), and Solomon's knot on floor mosaics in contemporary eastern churches has been shown to have fulfilled a similar apotropaic function in some cases.⁸⁷

As discussed in Chapter 1, the cross sign on such eastern Christian mosaics was used side by side not only with Solomon's knot but also, on some rare occasions, with signs reminiscent of late antique *characteres*.⁸⁸ This dual appearance of cruciform symbols with 'magical' signs points to a culture in which the use of 'magical' practices and related characters was quite common. It also bears witness to the process of cultural osmosis between officially approved Christian graphic culture and deviant visual practices harshly criticized by Christian preachers and bishops such as John Chrysostom and Augustine. Late antique Christians—especially in Egypt, Palestine, and Syria—were not different from the rest of society in their fondness

⁸⁵ For the discussions of the encolpion and sarcophagus, see respectively Chapter 2 and Bardill, *Constantine*, pp. 187–94. His attribution of the sarcophagus to Constantine I remains highly speculative.

⁸⁶ Kitzinger, 'The Threshold', pp. 640–4; Dinkler, 'Der salomonische Knoten'.

⁸⁷ Spier, 'An Antique Magical Book'; Maguire, 'Magic and Geometry', pp. 267–8; Erdeljan and Vranešević, 'Eikōn and Magic'.

⁸⁸ On the latter, see Gordon, 'Characteres', pp. 257–78.

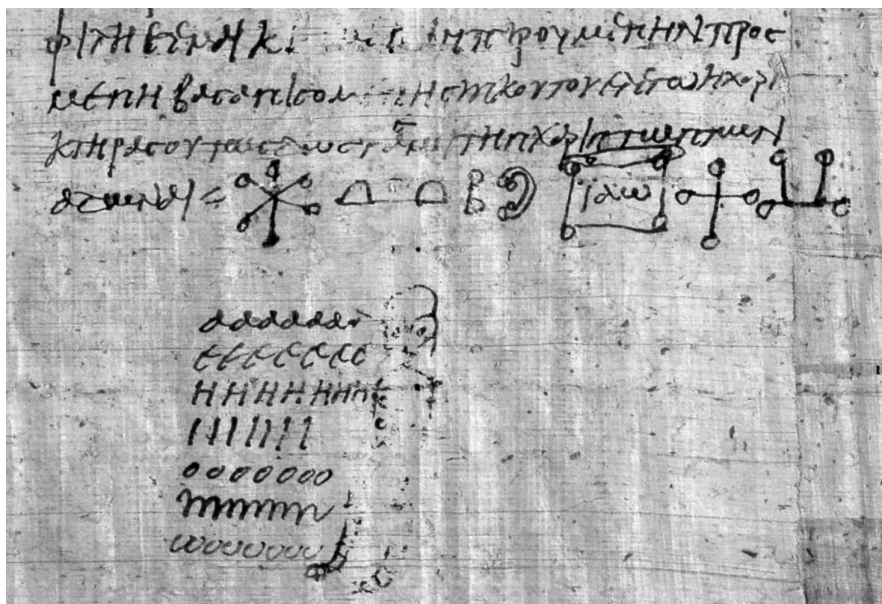


Fig. 3.15. Magical text from Egypt, fourth century, P.Oslo I 1, c.8. Courtesy of the University of Oslo Library Papyrus Collection.

for textual amulets, which empowered textual invocations of Christian as well as more obscure transcendent forces with rows of graphic characters, which could consist of magical *charactères* (Fig. 1.8) or Christian signs. The latter can be seen in a Greek binding spell from Egypt produced in the fourth or, more likely, fifth century (P.Oslo 15) and invoking Iao, Adonai, Eloie, Salaman, as well as Jesus Christ to protect a house from all evil, sorcery, and bad spirits, and empowering this textual amulet with the signs of the cross and ankh-cross (both featuring an alpha and omega), staurogram, and the acronym *IXΘΥΣ* (Fig. 3.14).⁸⁹

In late antiquity, these two groups of signs were not mutually exclusive. On the one hand, the sign of the cross was routinely included by occult masters into some chains of 'magical' characters—assimilated by the addition of small circles at the ends of its arms typical of such *charactères* (Fig. 3.15).⁹⁰ On the other hand, by the mid-fourth century, one of the most powerful 'magical' characters, an eight-armed star, was incorporated into the list of Christian symbols as the eight-armed cross or—with a loop at the end of the upper vertical line—as the tau-rho-chi. The latter symbol appeared, for instance, in Roman catacombs, on *tabulae* dated to 347 and 348,⁹¹ and on a few funerary stelae in Zoora, Palestine, dated to 386 and 406.⁹²

⁸⁹ Eitrem and Fridrichsen, 'Ein christliches Amulett'.

⁹⁰ Gordon, 'Charactères', p. 278, note 68.

⁹¹ Sulzberger, 'Le symbole', pp. 426–8; ICUR, vol. 7, no. 17433 (EDB, no. 21353); ICUR, vol. 1, no. 887 (EDB, no. 29417).

⁹² Meimaris and Kritikakou-Nikolaropoulou, *Inscriptions*, vol. 1A, no. 51; vol. 1B, no. 406.

A similarly liminal watershed between acceptable and so-called ‘magical’ graphic signs can be observed in cruciform devices with letters placed between the arms of the cross, which became extremely popular in early Byzantium from the sixth century onwards. For example, in the funerary epigraphy of Zoora, the practice of writing the letters of the name of the deceased in the four quadrants of the cross originated in the second half of the fifth century and became more established in the sixth.⁹³ A similar cruciform device appears as a pseudo-seal in a sixth-century Coptic ‘magical’ papyrus (PCairo 45060) marked with *signes pommetés*, and with the name of Sabaoth written in its four quadrants.⁹⁴ In the following centuries, a comparable graphic design was employed in the cruciform invocative monogram petitioning Theotokos for help, Θεοτόκε βοήθει (‘Mother of God, help’), whereby the end of this formulaic address, τῷ σῷ δούλῳ (‘your servant’), was written in the four quadrants of the cross (Fig. 7.14e).⁹⁵

These examples illustrate that, outside the normative world of Christian graphic symbology as presented in early Christian literature, the sign of the cross was engaged in a process of cultural cross-fertilization—in terms of both visual forms and functions—with more obscure late antique signs with perceived transcendent powers. This process increased the appeal of this sign amongst wider and more diverse social strata. At the same time, boosted by the flourishing cult of the Holy Cross, this graphic symbol developed into the primary Christian sign of authority in the fifth and sixth centuries, and began affecting other forms of late antique graphicacy too. Consequently, the growing prominence of this Christian symbol in those centuries left its unmistakable imprint on late antique monogrammatic culture, in which cruciform monograms and other cruciform graphic devices conceptualizing Christian identity, authority, and spiritual power came to dominate from the sixth century onwards.

⁹³ Meimaris and Kritikakou-Nikolaropoulou, *Inscriptions*, vol. 1B, nos. 71–4, and 79.

⁹⁴ Gordon, ‘*Caractères*’, pp. 278–9.

⁹⁵ For further details, see Chapter 7.

PART II

MONOGRAMMATIC CULTURE
IN LATE ANTIQUITY

4

Monograms, Early Christians, and Late Antique Culture

The origins of monograms can be traced to classical Greece and the Hellenistic world in particular, where such graphic devices became a regular feature of coin design. The coins of Alexander the Great and Philip III Arrhidaeus alone display around 1500 different monograms, added as small auxiliary marks to their reverse sides (Fig. 4.1).¹ These comprised the initial or most important letters of personal names, making them consequently difficult to decipher. In the older academic tradition, scholars believed that the monograms represented the names of their issuing authorities, such as Hellenistic kings, generals, or higher magistrates.² In contrast, modern numismatists tend to see these small graphic devices as control marks stamped by lower-status employees of a mint, namely mint masters or moneyers involved in coin production, or other mint employees responsible for the weight and alloy control of minted coins.³ Selected letters conjoined within a single monogrammatic structure thus communicated information about the coins' producers within the limited field of the coin itself. Monogrammatic control marks were especially popular in the third century BC, but in the following centuries these individualizing numismatic signs came to be gradually replaced by the full names of people involved in their production, or by more simplified control marks, namely single letters and/or the year of production.⁴ These early monograms thus developed as a specific form of producers' stamps, which could occasionally be used on other mass-produced objects such as pottery.⁵

This numismatic practice first affected Roman republican coinage after Rome came into close contact with the Hellenistic world, and monogrammatic combinations or ligatures combining two, three, or four letters were occasionally used by moneyers to mark denarii produced in the second and first centuries BC.⁶ The Hellenistic numismatic tradition of monogrammatic stamps continued in the Early Imperial period, when moneyers used both Greek and Latin monograms as

¹ Price, *The Coinage*, vol. 2, pp. 550–630.

² Gardthausen, *Das alte Monogramm*, pp. 32–42.

³ For a detailed overview of the functions and usage of monograms on Hellenistic coinages as well as relevant bibliography, see de Callatay, 'Control Marks'.

⁴ de Callatay, 'Control Marks', pp. 56–7.

⁵ See e.g. a late Hellenistic mould-made pottery lamp in London (BrM, reg. no. 1908,0517.7), which features a complicated Greek monogram on its base.

⁶ e.g. Crawford, *Roman Republican Coinage*, nos. 132–4 and 142–4. In addition, a half-ligature and half-monogram of the mint name ROMA once appeared in this period (nos. 293–5).



Fig. 4.1. Silver coin (four drachmas) of Alexander III with a monogram as a mintmark (Babylon, 325–3 bc). Princeton University Numismatic Collection, Department of Rare Books and Special Collections, Firestone Library.

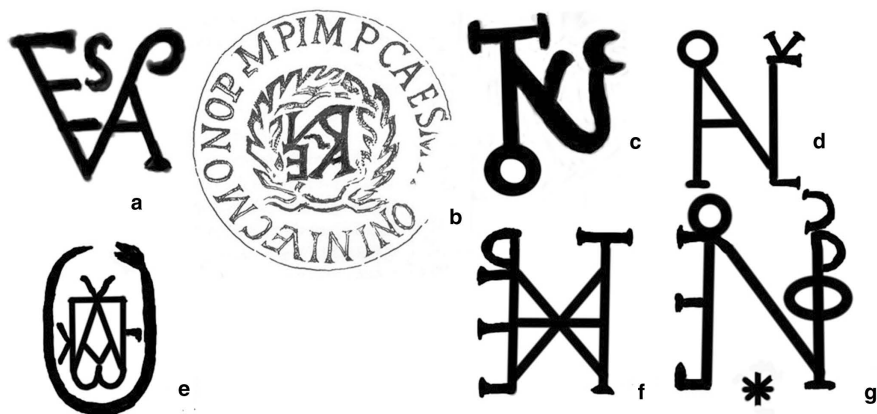


Fig. 4.2. Latin and Greek monograms of the Early Imperial period: a) monogram *Vespasianus* used as his countermark on the coins of Nero c.88–9; b) monogram *Aurelius* on late second- or early third-century balsamaria; c) on the second-century jasper gem from the Ashmolean Museum; d–g) Greek monograms on third-century eastern gems, based on Spier, *Late Antique and Early Christian Gems*, correspondingly nos. M12, M14, M1, M23.

a stamp type to countermark provincial coins in the Greek East and Latin West. These monograms were usually composed of the initial letters of encoded words, and have been interpreted as the names of provincial cities or regions, dependent Hellenistic kings, and Roman emperors (e.g. Nero) and their titles (i.e. *imperator*, *Augustus*, and *Caesar*).⁷ In exceptional cases, the coins of Roman emperors were countermarked in the manner of provincial coinage. Thus, the monogram of Vespasian (Fig. 4.2a), emperor from AD 69 to 79, was stamped on copper coins

⁷ Howgego, *Greek Imperial Countermarks*, nos. 604–44 (Greek monograms) and 645–59 (Latin monograms); Burnett, Amandry, and Ripollès, *Roman Provincial Coinage*, vol. 1, p. 810 (for Spain).

of Nero (AD 37–68) during the civil war of 68–9 following the latter's suicide, when Vespasian still remained a military commander in Palestine.⁸ Here, the monogrammatic stamp both prolonged the use of Nero's coins and functioned as a graphic sign of Vespasian's authority in areas under his own control. Numismatists have traditionally deciphered this monogram as VESPA, but in fact all the letters of Vespasian's name (*Vespasianus*) can be read in its structure.

In its usage, Vespasian's monogrammatic device resembles the personal monograms that were sometimes placed on glass vessels in the Early Imperial period,⁹ such as a Latin monogram within a laurel wreath that appears on the bases of candlestick-type balsamaria found in northern Italy (Fig. 4.2b), dated to the period between the mid-first and third century. This graphic sign was accompanied by the inscription *Vec[tigal] monop[oliu]m p. Imp. Caes. M.A. . . . onini*, placing the production of such vessels within the reign of Marcus Aurelius Antoninus (161–80) or Marcus Aurelius Severus Antoninus (198–217), better known by his nickname Caracalla.¹⁰ The monogram consists of the letters A, R, V, E, S, and probably L and I, presenting to its viewer the imperial nomen *Aurelius*. This graphic device thus probably reveals an issuing imperial authority exercising monopoly on a certain product, in this case balsam.¹¹ Aurelius' monogrammatic sign also had an additional similarity to its Greek precursors, guaranteeing the quality of the products that bore the stamp. Such monogrammatic stamps probably continued to be employed occasionally on concurrent pottery, as can be deduced from an Early Imperial lamp (dated c. 80–120) from the British Museum, which was produced in Egypt and features a *ΠΟ* monogrammatic stamp impressed within its base-ring.¹²

Unlike contemporaneous coinage, Hellenistic signet-rings rarely featured inscribed monograms. The practice of carving personal monograms onto ring gems became more popular, however, in the second century AD, increasing further still in the following century. One of the early material witnesses to this practice is a red jasper gem now held in the Ashmolean Museum. Dated on stylistic grounds to the second century AD (Fig. 4.2c), it features a bust in profile and an undeciphered Greek monogram, both engraved in negative onto the gem.¹³ This example was by no means an isolated case, and Jeffrey Spier has recently identified a group of rings attributable to the first half of the third century—most of which have jasper and cornelian gems—that were similarly inscribed with intaglio box Greek monograms. These graphic devices were constructed around the letters M, N, and Π, and employed most or all the letters of the ring owners' names (Fig. 4.2d–g).¹⁴

In late antiquity, the use of monograms became widespread in both the Greek East and Latin West, and they began to be placed on a wide range of material

⁸ RIC, vol. 1, pp. 10–11.

⁹ Gardthausen, *Das alte Monogramm*, pp. 18–19; Kisa, *Das Glass*, vol. 3, p. 932, no. 48; and Spier, *Late Antique and Early Christian Gems*, p. 193.

¹⁰ Frova, 'Vetri romani'.

¹¹ For a discussion of the *vectigal monopolium* inscription on such glass vessels, see Fleming, *Roman Glass*, p. 65.

¹² London, BrM, reg. no. 1987,0402.8.

¹³ Henig and MacGregor, eds, *Catalogue*, vol. 2, p. 69, no. 5.24; Spier, *Late Antique and Early Christian Gems*, p. 193, notes 2, 4, and 5, and plate 141, fig. 28.

¹⁴ Spier, *Late Antique and Early Christian Gems*, pp. 193–5, nos. M1–M39.

objects. By that time, the structure of monograms had changed from that of their earlier Hellenistic prototypes: late antique monograms were expected to consist of all the letters of encoded words. No longer limited to the function of pragmatic control marks, they developed into more sophisticated visual devices, encoding personal names and ritualistic phrases such as acclamations and intercessory prayers. In short, late antique monograms departed from their classical precursors not only in terms of their quantitative scope but also in their contextual functions and the messages they communicated.

4.1. LATE ANTIQUE EPIGRAPHIC CULTURE AND MONOGRAMS AS EPIGRAPHIC DEVICES

By the third century AD, monograms had found their way not just onto such media as glass vessels and signet-rings, but also into epigraphic culture, where they most usually encoded personal names. The earliest Greek monograms carved in early Roman catacombs most likely belong to this period, although such early examples lack precise dating. Similar to classical numismatic examples, some epigraphic monograms consisted of only a few letters, as in the case of a tau-rho monogram (a rho grafted upon the vertical bar of a tau) below the name *Ἀφροδίσις* on a third-century marble *tabula* from the Catacombs of San Callisto (Fig. 4.3a), or a pi-rho monogram accompanying the *titulus* of *Εὐστόργις* in the Catacombs of Domitilla, tentatively dated to the second half of the third century (Fig. 4.3b).¹⁵ Yet box

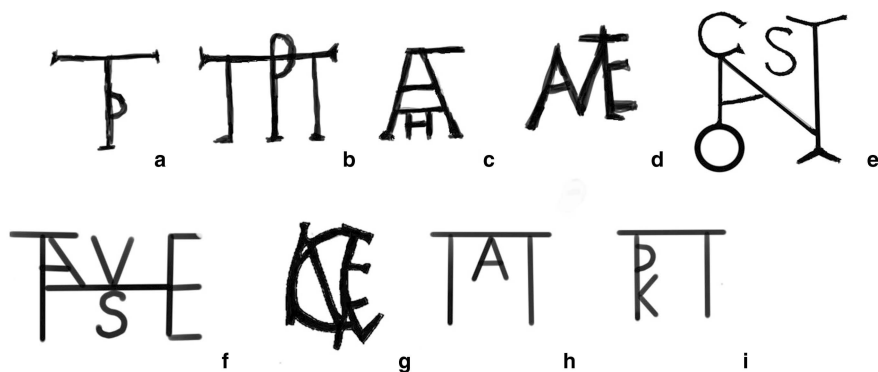


Fig. 4.3. Third- and fourth-century monograms from Roman catacombs: a) TP (ICUR, vol. 4, no. 10579); b) *Πρῖμα*? (ICUR, vol. 4, no. 10579); c) *Ἀγάπη* (ICUR, vol. 5, no. 15148.h); d) *Avite* (ICUR, vol. 5, no. 14752.c); e) *Constans* or *Constantius* (ICUR, vol. 5, no. 13277); f) *Alethius* (ICUR, vol. 3, no. 8748); g) *Gaudentia* (ICUR, vol. 5, no. 14752.a); h) *Πάστωρ*? (ICUR, vol. 1, no. 2058); i) *Πρίσκος* (ICUR, vol. 4, no. 10713.q).

¹⁵ ICUR, vol. 4, no. 10579 (EDB, no. 884); and ICUR, vol. 3, no. 7203 (EDB, no. 23774). Such abbreviated monograms continued to be used in the fourth century, e.g. ICUR, vol. 1, no. 2058 (EDB, no. 11877); ICUR, vol. 9, no. 26303 (EDB, no. 13021); ICUR, vol. 9, no. 24101 (EDB, no. 13061).

monograms, containing all the letters of encoded names, had no doubt become prevalent by the turn of the fourth century.¹⁶ It is possible that some early monogrammatic devices communicated specific Christian wishes, such as the monogram encoding the word *Ἀγάπη* (Christian love) (Fig. 4.3c),¹⁷ although this might equally have referred to the female personal name *Ἀγάπη*, then quite popular in early Christian Rome.¹⁸ These early examples also demonstrate that, from the time of their introduction onto Christian epigraphs, monograms were used not as abbreviation marks but as visual devices that treated personal names and, perhaps, particular words, in a special way. They were inscribed to place visual emphasis on either a specific Christian wish, or the name of a deceased person.

By the fourth century, this Greek practice had influenced Latin inscriptions in Roman catacombs, and Latin monograms equalled Greek ones in number in such a funerary context. At the same time, the principles of graphic composition that defined the structure of Latin monograms began to differ from their Greek counterparts. Some were built as sequences of Latin ligatures (AV, TE, NT, and so on) intended to be read from left to right (Fig. 4.3d);¹⁹ combinations of this kind had a long history in Roman and early Christian epigraphics.²⁰ Others employed the letters N, H, and M as their starting building block, adding additional letters arbitrarily around that monogrammatic frame (Fig. 4.3e–f).²¹ The rest conjoined letters in more complicated calligraphic ways (Fig. 4.3g).²² Some monograms combined these three modes in their graphic structures. The resulting forms consequently look quite different to Greek monograms, which frequently employed the letter pi in various combinations with alpha, theta, eta, and chi, as well as with other letters, to create more geometrically balanced visual forms (Fig. 4.3h–i).²³

Whilst they may have had dissimilar graphic silhouettes, Latin monograms were not unlike their Greek counterparts in their semantic content. They usually encoded the names of deceased people, sometimes influenced by Greek prototypes, such as the Latin monogram of the name *Agape* inscribed in the Catacombs of Cyriaca (Fig. 4.4a).²⁴ In some cases, these fourth-century devices hid acclamatory messages, such as the monogram *Avite* (hail) (Fig. 4.3d), which finds a Greek parallel in the acclamatory monogram *Χαῖρε* inscribed in the first half of the

¹⁶ *Ἰανάρια*: ICUR, vol. 5, no. 15148.i (EDB, no. 3454); *Ἀγριππῖνα*: ICUR, vol. 5, no. 15148.g (EDB, no. 3918); *Πέτρος*: ICUR, vol. 3, no. 8392 (EDB, no. 25606); *Μακαρία*: ICUR, vol. 3, no. 7230 (EDB, no. 23805).

¹⁷ ICUR, vol. 1, no. 696 (EDB, no. 16636); ICUR, vol. 5, no. 14974 (EDB, no. 1442); ICUR, vol. 5, no. 15148.h (EDB, no. 3453). See also Testini, *Archeologia*, p. 354.

¹⁸ Kajanto, *Onomastic Studies*, pp. 91 and 113–14.

¹⁹ e.g. ICUR, vol. 5, no. 14752.c (EDB, no. 1389).

²⁰ Testini, *Archeologia*, p. 352.

²¹ e.g. ICUR, vol. 5, no. 13277 (EDB, no. 5400); ICUR, vol. 6, no. 16785.a (EDB, no. 12341); ICUR, vol. 3, no. 8748 (EDB, no. 19095); ICUR, vol. 8, no. 23106.a (EDB, no. 38059).

²² e.g. ICUR, vol. 5, no. 14752.b (EDB, no. 4961); ICUR, vol. 5, no. 14752.a (EDB, no. 4960).

²³ e.g. ICUR, vol. 1, no. 2058 (EDB, no. 11877); ICUR, vol. 4, no. 10713.q (EDB, no. 7556).

²⁴ ICUR, vol. 7, no. 19427.c (EDB, no. 35326).

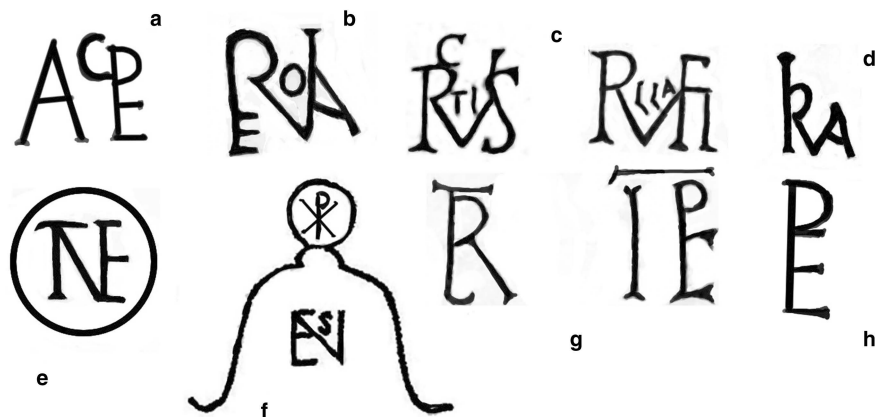


Fig. 4.4. Fourth- and fifth-century monograms from Roman catacombs: a) *Agape* (ICUR, vol. 7, no. 19427.c); b) *Petronia*? (ICUR, vol. 7, no. 17995); c) *Rusticius* and *Rufilla* (ICUR, vol. 9, no. 25792); d) *Navira* (ICUR, vol. 5, no. 14751); e) *Eufentine*? (ICUR, vol. 2, no. 6060); f) *Annes* (ICUR, vol. 9, no. 24236.a); g) *Petrus in pace* (ICUR, vol. 2, no. 4516); h) *Palma et laurus*.

fourth century.²⁵ Occasionally, personal monograms functioned as quasi-ownership marks as, for example, in the case of the monogram of Constans or Constantius carved over the entrance to a private basilica in the Catacombs of Pretestato in Rome (Fig. 4.3e).²⁶ In other cases, personal monograms almost functioned as producers' marks, encoding the names of individuals who had commissioned funerary *tabulae* for their deceased relatives. One such instance of this use is evident on the funerary marble plaque of a certain Quadratinus, on which a box monogram (possibly of Petronia) is carved between the two final words of the inscription, *soror fecit* (the sister M. has made) (Fig. 4.4b).²⁷

In the course of the fourth century, it became relatively common to carve the personal monograms of the deceased without any accompanying text, not only on funerary plaques but also on the central frontal part of sarcophagi.²⁸ A well-known example of such practice survives on a sarcophagus fragment from the Catacombs of Priscilla, later moved to the mausoleum attached to the *Basilica S. Sylvestri*,

²⁵ ICUR, vol. 7, no. 14752.c (EDB, no. 1389); ICUR, vol. 3, no. 7274 (EDB, no. 22765). On the use of *χαίρε* in Greek epigraphs, see Kajanto, *The Study of Greek Epigraphs*, pp. 18 and 39–40.

²⁶ ICUR, vol. 5, no. 13277 (EDB, no. 5400). See also a *tabula* from the Catacomb of Cyriaca dated to c.390–425, where a box monogram precedes the word *cub(iculum)* in the first line of the inscription, ICUR, vol. 7, no. 17661 (EDB, no. 34616); ICUR, vol. 7, no. 17663e (EDB, no. 34622).

²⁷ ICUR, vol. 7, no. 17995 (EDB, no. 27389); ICUR, vol. 7, no. 18007f (EDB, no. 27418).

²⁸ *Φιλάδελφος*: ICUR, vol. 5, no. 15148.d (EDB, no. 3915); *Valerius Quartus*: ICUR, vol. 9, no. 25792 (EDB, no. 16825); *Κηρσωρέινος*: ICUR, vol. 4, no. 10713.l (EDB, no. 7478); *Ἀθηνόδωρος*: ICUR, vol. 4, no. 10713.n (EDB, no. 7480); *Μόδεστος*: ICUR, vol. 4, no. 10713.p (EDB, no. 7481); *Rusticius* and *Rufilla*: ICUR, vol. 9, no. 25792 (EDB, no. 16824); *Fortunatus* or *Vetranio*: *Arachne Database*, ID no. 1398735, serial no. 224651.

which presents the box monograms of Rusticius and Rufilla (Fig. 4.4c).²⁹ In the box monogram of Rusticius the chain of letters should be followed from left to right three times, while the encoded name of Rufilla presents an intermediary form between a Latin abbreviated inscription and a proper monogram, wherein the first four letters are written in a calligraphic manner from left to right and the last three letters are inscribed above the capital letter U. As to marble *tabulae* without accompanying epigraphs, personal monograms of the deceased were often treated as graphic images and presented alongside Christian symbols, evident on the funerary plaque of Navira from the Catacombs of Pretestato, where Navira's box monogram (Fig. 4.4d) is flanked by two early Christian symbols, a dolphin and an anchor.³⁰

With the increasing use of the chi-rho sign in funerary epigraphs from the second quarter of the fourth century onwards, and in the late fourth century in particular, some monograms began to be treated as personal equivalents of the primary sign of Christ. Thus, on a marble *tabula* from the Catacombs of Commodilla, inscribed in 400, the box monogram of a person's name was set within a 'laurel' circle identical to the one used in conjunction with chi-rhos on Roman funerary inscriptions of the late fourth century (Fig. 4.4e).³¹ On another funerary plaque, the box monogram of a certain *Annes* was carved beneath a triumphant chi-rho and was 'shielded' on both sides, as it were, by the hanging ends of the latter's ribbon (Fig. 4.4f), with the effect that the two signs created a graphic device demonstrating that the deceased's imperishable soul was entrusted to the Lord's protection.³²

Latin acclamatory monograms reached a new level of popularity from the second half of the fourth century onwards into the fifth, when new forms of monograms were constructed to encode established Latin phrases such as [*depositus*] *in pace* ([laid down] in peace), sometimes appearing in combination with the name of the deceased.³³ The marble *tabula* of a certain *Petrus* from the Catacombs of Ponziano, for instance, dated by inscription to 443, features two monograms that have both been deciphered as *Petrus in pace* (Fig. 4.4g).³⁴ It is noteworthy that the second graphic device features a contraction over the letters I and the ligature of PE, illustrating how Latin palaeographic norms could be employed in the construction of such graphic devices.

In this period, the usage of one specific acclamatory bar monogram became more consistent, present in catacombs as well as above the ground in Rome. The

²⁹ ICUR, vol. 9, no. 25792 (EDB, no. 16824); and Fiocchi Nicolai, Bisconti, and Mazzoleni, *The Christian Catacombs*, pp. 159–60.

³⁰ ICUR, vol. 5, no. 14751 (EDB, no. 4959). See also ICUR, vol. 9, no. 25794 (EDB, no. 16827) from the Catacombs of Priscilla, where a non-deciphered monogram is accompanied by the image of a dove.

³¹ *Eufentine* (suggested by Marucchi): ICUR, vol. 2, no. 6060 (EDB, no. 16491).

³² ICUR, vol. 9, no. 24236.a (EDB, no. 12267).

³³ ICUR, vol. 3, no. 9212 (EDB, no. 18099); ICUR, vol. 4, no. 12303 (EDB, no. 7355). As pointed out by Danilo Mazzoleni, '*in pace*' was by far 'the most common expression' in early Christian epitaphs: 'The Rise of Christianity', p. 453.

³⁴ ICUR, vol. 2, no. 4516 (EDB, no. 18947).

monogram is composed of the letter P with an E added to the lower part of its vertical bar (Fig. 4.4h); the latter letter is occasionally replaced with an L or F. Since, in many instances, this monogram is accompanied by the image of a palm leaf, the PE monogram has been decoded as consisting of the word *palma*, an interpretation that allows for several possible triumphant acclamations: *Palma et laurus* (The palm and laurel!), *Palma Elea* (The Elean palm!), or *Palma feliciter* (Happy victory!).³⁵

These readings are supported by the evidence that in the same period this monogram appeared in circus settings. Some late antique medallions, struck in Rome from the mid-fourth through to the fifth century and known as contorniates, feature this graphic sign or the image of a palm leaf in their field (Fig. 4.5).³⁶ The precise function of contorniates remains unclear, although their reverse imagery featuring circus events and chariots and naming charioteers indicates a possible connection with circus games—they were perhaps used as admission tickets or souvenirs, as gaming pieces, or as gifts distributed during New Year celebrations, in which a *pompa circensis* (circus procession) continued to play a crucial role in the Late Imperial period.³⁷ Indeed, such a triumphant acclamation would have been most appropriate in a circus context, and the mid-fourth-century inscription of the Roman senator Clodius Ablabius Reginus from the Flavian Amphitheatre in Rome features the PE monogram accompanied by the image of a palm leaf (Fig. 4.6). After the mid-fourth century, this monogram could also be used as a Christian marker. In that function, it was for example carved alongside a palm leaf in Rome on the classical statuette of a ploughing farmer and ox, currently on display in the Staatliche Museen in Berlin.³⁸ The monogram was added on the ox's



Fig. 4.5. Obverse of a late Roman contorniate with the *Palma et laurus* monogram in the field. London, BrM, reg. no. R.4814. © The Trustees of the British Museum.

³⁵ Marucchi, *Christian Epigraphy*, pp. 67–8; Marrou, 'Palma et Laurus'; Testini, *Archeologia*, p. 361; Carletti, 'Un monogramma', pp. 127–42.

³⁶ Mittag, *Alte Köpfe*, table 8, Traianus XV, XVIII; and table 14, Kutscher IX.

³⁷ Etkins, 'Medallions', pp. 17–18; Latham, *Performance*, pp. 183–232.

³⁸ Antikensammlung, inv. no. SK490, Arachne Database, no. 409903. I am grateful to Lea Stirling for pointing me to this artefact.



Fig. 4.6. Marble plaque with the *Palma et laurus* monogram and the symbol of the palm leaf accompanying on the inscription of Clodius Ablabius Reginus from the Flavian Amphitheatre in Rome, mid-fourth century.

haec tibi aeterna domus in qua vivens ipsa secura quiescis
 corpore; namque tuus spiritus ac arde recedens
 est sociatus sanctis promeritis et operatanta
 quaeque deum metuisti semper quiescis secura
 dedisti corpus terrae picusque receptus
 splendori cum lumine claro
 squaete semper deo dicastis
 tas sed pro factis adalta vocaris
 cia pacatiano cum laeta debet
 pacatianus eleuteriae matri suae locum fecit
 quae vixit annis pluss xxv mens ii dies x dies iii kalendas
 in pace cons. dñi claudi iuliani avc. iii et felix salutis con-
 hesperius quem nuntius iscripsit

Fig. 4.7. Tabula of Eleuteria from Roman catacombs (a. 363). From ICUR, vol. 1, no. 1426.

thigh, and is visually reminiscent of cross signs added to classical statues in that period—especially in the Greek East—with the aim of adjusting pagan artworks to new Christian settings.³⁹

The earliest precisely datable appearance of this graphic device in Roman Christian catacombs occurs on an impressive funerary *tabula* commissioned in 363 by a certain Pacatianus for his deceased mother Eleuteria (Fig. 4.7). The *tabula* is inscribed with a short funerary poem, the nine lines of which each finish with a symbolic sign, monogram or letter: a palm leaf, wreath, chi-rho, PE monogram, palm leaf, swastika (*crux gammata*), bucranium/vase, omega, and upsilon respectively.⁴⁰ This sequence of devices is noteworthy, firstly because they are all treated as visual symbols by their

³⁹ Jacobs, 'Cross Graffiti'.

⁴⁰ ICUR, vol. 1, no. 1426 (EDB, no. 31189); Carletti, 'Un monogramma', p. 140.

maker, and secondly because the *Palma et laurus* monogram is located next to such established symbols as the palm leaf and the chi-rho christogram. This inscription thus illustrates that by the mid-fourth century acclamatory monograms, and the PE monogram in particular, had become a well-established phenomenon in late Roman epigraphic practice. This practice affected contemporary manuscript culture, as the *Calendar of 354* aptly demonstrates.

4.2. THE *CALENDAR OF 354* AND FOURTH-CENTURY ROMAN ARISTOCRATIC CULTURE

The *Calendar of 354*, a fourth-century compilation that is known to us only through its later copies, was a unique manuscript in many respects; among other things, it greeted its late antique and early medieval viewers with an impressive calligraphic monogram on its first dedication page (Fig. 4.8).⁴¹ As the Latin text on this opening page informs us, Furius Dionysius Filocalus produced the late antique original for a certain Roman noble named Valentinus. Little is known about the latter, other than that he may have belonged to an established aristocratic Roman family, the Symmachi.⁴² Judging by the content of the codex, its noble recipient was either a Christian or an individual positively inclined towards Christianity. The manuscript's producer, on the other hand, was better known: a famed Roman calligrapher involved in the production of the carved epigrams of Pope Damasus I (366–84) that were destined for renovated papal tombs and subterranean *martyria* in Roman catacombs.⁴³ Damasus' papal undertaking has been viewed as one of the public acts of his successful policy to make Christianity culturally and aesthetically appealing to the Roman senatorial aristocracy, and Filocalus' involvement in that epigraphic project, as well as his 'authorship' of the *Calendar of 354*, indicates that he was both a member of Roman Christian aristocratic circles and a highly skilled artisan capable of working on both stone and parchment.

Considering Filocalus' background, it should be no surprise that his monogrammatic device was created in accordance with Latin epigraphic norms, traceable in contemporary inscriptions in Roman catacombs. This device incorporates ligatures of the letters N, T, E in the lower field, and of the letters A and V in the upper right field. Filocalus' epigraphic experience, and his familiarity with funerary art in general, can be further established in the layout of the dedication page when viewed as a whole. It features a *tabula ansata*, found elsewhere in diverse types of late antique epigraphic inscriptions, and the entire composition, formed of two

⁴¹ The layout of this page is known to us through early modern copies of the lost ninth-century copy of that late antique codex. Stern, *Le Calendrier*, pp. 118–23, fig. 1. For the contextual study of this work, see Salzman, *On Roman Time*. For the most recent study of the manuscript tradition with relevant references, see Diviak and Wischmeyer, eds, *Kalenderhandbuch*. For a discussion of variations among the surviving copies of the dedication page, see Diviak and Wischmeyer, eds, *Kalenderhandbuch*, vol. 1, pp. 75–80, figs 6–9.

⁴² Salzman, *On Roman Time*, pp. 201–2.

⁴³ Marucchi, *Christian Epigraphy*, pp. 340–61, esp. at p. 351; Stern, *Le Calendrier*, p. 123; Salzman, *On Roman Time*, pp. 199–205; and Cameron, 'Filocalus'; ICUR, vol. 4, no. 9515 (EDB, no. 19478).



Fig. 4.8. Dedication page in the *Calendar of 354*, in Vatican City, Codex Vaticanus Barberini lat. 2154 (a. 1620). From Strzygowski, *Die Calenderbilder*, fig. III.

winged Cupids or angels holding such a *tabula*, is visible on the frontal side of certain late antique sarcophagi. The employment of a medallion in the central position is also typical of that medium, where a *clipeus* traditionally contained the portrait image of a deceased person. But in the fourth century, it might also be filled by a funerary epigraph.⁴⁴

⁴⁴ For an example, see *Repertorium der christlich-antiken Sarkophage*, vol. 1, no. 132, p. 88.

The medallion on the dedication page, meanwhile, features a monogram that duplicates the phrase written on both its sides, namely '*Valentine, floreas in Deo*' (Valentinus, may you flourish in God!), suggesting that this graphic device had a different function to the personal monograms carved in Roman subterranean cemeteries. On the one hand, it draws to mind contemporaneous acclamations, which developed into a highly popular late antique form of ritualized collective speech designed to address divinities, to express public opinion, demand or approval, or to honour an individual,⁴⁵ and which consequently influenced early Christian liturgy.⁴⁶ A monogrammatic device might therefore have been seen as a visual means of emphasizing the special nature of that particular phrase. On the other hand, the medallion invites its viewers to interpret the phrase as a graphic image, thus leading them from the realm of literacy to that of graphicacy, in which the linguistic substrate held a subservient position to the norms of graphic visualization. Indeed, the monogrammatic device occupied the central position on the upper page of the codex, and stood twice as high as the two lines of the corresponding text, which is to say that the size and the location of the monogram followed the main principles of the modern visual pop-up effect well known amongst graphic designers.⁴⁷ This effect serves both to catch the viewer's attention and to accentuate the significance of the graphic composition. Two other subjunctive phrases on this page are addressed to Valentinus: '*Valentine, vivas floreas*' (Valentinus, may you live and flourish!) and '*Valentine vivas gaudeas*' (Valentinus, may you live and rejoice!). Yet these were written by Filocalus in smaller letters and thus attract less attention than the first subjunctive phrase, which received a special eye-catching graphic device designed to dominate the page. The different treatment of this phrase is no doubt intentional, since the unique formula '*floreas in Deo*' was constructed in imitation of contemporary Christian acclamations such as '*vivas in Deo*' or '*vivatis in Deo*', and hence can also be interpreted as Christian.⁴⁸ Diviak and Wischmeyer suggest that the Latin phrase was constructed in imitation of the Christian Greek phrases ζῆν ἐν θεῷ (to live in God) or χαίρειν ἐν θεῷ (to rejoice in God), attested in Asia Minor.⁴⁹ The monogram thus makes absolutely clear to its viewer the hierarchy of optative messages on the page, with the Christian message occupying (both semantically and visually) top billing.

The significance of the Christian message is further emphasized by the use of the letter O as the monogram's external frame, the shape of which brings to mind honorific medallion portraits. In employing that letter for this purpose, Filocalus stands as a forerunner to those early medieval scribes who frequently used O as both letter and frame.⁵⁰ This usage makes his graphic device quite different from the concurrent box monograms carved in Roman catacombs,

⁴⁵ Roueché, 'Acclamations in the Later Roman Empire'; Roueché, 'Acclamations at the Council of Chalcedon'.

⁴⁶ Williams, 'Hymns as Acclamations'.

⁴⁷ Ware, *Information Visualization*, pp. 14 and 140; and Ware, *Visual Thinking*, pp. 24–32.

⁴⁸ Salzman, *On Roman Time*, p. 199, and note 11.

⁴⁹ Diviak and Wischmeyer, eds, *Kalenderhandbuch*, vol. 1, p. 80.

⁵⁰ For a discussion of early medieval parallels, see Kessler, 'Dynamic Signs', pp. 120–1.

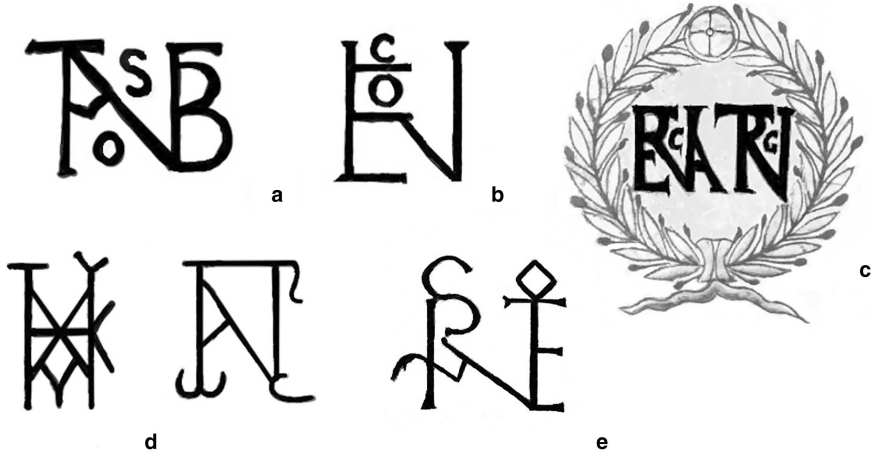


Fig. 4.9. Late antique monograms: a–b) from Roman catacombs, *Bonifatius* (ICUR, vol. 3, no. 8332.e) and *Leonis*?, a. 386 (ICUR, vol. 8, no. 21609.c); c) from silver plates in the Esquiline Treasure, Rome; d) *νικῆ ἡ τύχη τῶν Πρασίνων* monograms from Aphrodisias and Ephesos; e) monogram from a marble tombstone in Villareggia.

which usually had the letter O attached to an end of one of their constituent vertical bars, for instance that on the fourth-century monogram of Constans or Constantius in the Catacombs of Pretestato (Fig. 4.3e).⁵¹ Another means to incorporate the letter O in such funerary graphic devices was to include it within their inner structure, as for example in the monogram of Bonifatius from the Catacombs of Domitilla (Fig. 4.9a) or in that carved in 386 for, presumably, Leo in the Catacombs of St Agnes (Fig. 4.9b).⁵²

The only explanation for Filocalus' deviation from established calligraphic practices is that he designed his dedication monogram to be a visual message that emphasized the meaning of the text written by its sides. By creating an object-like word-image, he utilized a perceptual principle later identified by modern Gestalt psychology, namely that human vision tends to perceive closed contours like a circle and squares as objects. For this reason, modern graphic designers commonly use such contours to visualize concepts.⁵³ By placing the letters of the monogram within the circular frame of the letter O, Filocalus did precisely the same thing, creating a visually coherent conceptual message that invited its beholder to engage in visual contemplation.

All in all, the location, function, and form of the monogrammatic device in the *Calendar of 354* indicates that, by the mid-fourth century, Roman Christian communities were beginning to understand monograms as calligraphic devices with

⁵¹ ICUR, vol. 5, no. 13277, table xiv, 6a. On this particular catacomb, see Fiocchi Nicolai, Bisconti, and Mazzoleni, *The Christian Catacombs*, p. 19.

⁵² ICUR, vol. 3, no. 8332.e (EDB, no. 25311); and ICUR, vol. 8, no. 21609.c (EDB, no. 35801).

⁵³ Ware, *Information Visualization*, pp. 186–7 and 222–4.



Fig. 4.10. Silver plate from the Esquiline Treasure. London, BrM, reg. no. 1866,1229.14. © The Trustees of the British Museum.

aesthetic value and extralinguistic properties, which could express idiosyncratic honours to individuals of elite status. As such, personal monograms appeared on artefacts belonging to contemporary aristocratic culture, such as the set of silver plates from the Esquiline Treasure—four circular and four rectangular shaped (Fig. 4.10). These eight gilded plates with niello inlay were produced in Rome in the second half of the fourth century, and were probably hidden on the Esquiline Hill in 410.⁵⁴ Two box monograms were engraved in the middle of their front sides (Fig. 4.9c), the place that in the Imperial and Early Byzantine periods often featured a figural image.⁵⁵ The monograms are framed by a laurel wreath, drawing parallels with chi-rhos that appeared within the same frame on coins and monuments connected to the Theodosian dynasty.⁵⁶

⁵⁴ London, BrM, reg. nos. 1866.1229.11–18; Christie, *From Constantine*, p. 101.

⁵⁵ See Toynbee and Painter, 'Silver Picture Plates'.

⁵⁶ For more details, see Chapter 2.

The monograms on these plates have been read as *Pelegrinae Turcii*, with the two names transcribed from the left to the right following Roman epigraphic conventions.⁵⁷ The luxury silverware was therefore marked as being produced for and owned by Pelegrina, a member of the well-known aristocratic Turcii family of fourth-century Rome, some members of which remained openly pagan until the end of the fourth century.⁵⁸ The name Pelegrina is spelled out on a silver ewer found in the same hoard, and some have even speculated that Pelegrina could have been a daughter of Turcius Secundus and Proiecta, both named on another silver object in this treasure, the so-called 'Proiecta Casket',⁵⁹ but there is no way to prove this assumption. This treasure most likely contains silver objects accumulated by a branch of the Turcii family resident on the Esquiline Hill for several generations, and another female name, Marciana, was inscribed on several objects at a later point, including a plate that already featured Pelegrina's monogram. Pelegrina may thus have been either an older relative of Turcius Secundus, or a younger relative of Secundus and Proiecta. Some scholars hypothesize that Proiecta was the same girl commemorated in an epigraph of Pope Damasus, who died in 385 at the age of sixteen. Furthermore, they identify that girl as a daughter of Florus, an important figure at the eastern Christian court of Theodosius I.⁶⁰ Even if this identification of Proiecta is far from certain, the evidence of the casket alone demonstrates that she was Christian: it is not only embellished with traditional classical motifs such as Venus bathing, but also with a Christian wedding benediction on its rim made of lead, '*Secunde et Proiecta, vivatis in Christo*' (Secundus and Proiecta, may you live in Christ!).⁶¹ Consequently, the casket has been viewed as a bridal gift given to a Christian Proiecta by a husband who might also have belonged to Christian circles in Rome. On the whole, the existing evidence is sufficiently compelling to allow the suggestion that Pelegrina's monograms originate from within the aristocratic Christian milieu of the Eternal City in the age of Filocalus and Pope Damasus.

In the late fourth-century city of Rome, masterfully crafted box monograms thus satisfied the tastes of both late Roman aristocrats and early Christians. Moreover, existing evidence indicates that this monogrammatic tradition also appealed to Italian landowners outside the eternal city. Two forms of a personal monogram in the genitive, *Philippiani*, appear on tiles produced for a Roman villa at Gerace in Sicily c.375 or slightly later. Philippianus was probably the landowner of the estate where the tiles were produced, and textual stamps spelling out his name in full mark the vast majority of the ninety-nine tiles discovered during recent excavations. Five tiles, however, feature stamps deviating from that traditional Roman type used throughout the Imperial period. One tile presents an oval stamp with a simple box monogram of that

⁵⁷ Shelton, *The Esquiline Treasure*, p. 33.

⁵⁸ Buckton, ed., *Byzantium*, pp. 34–5, nos. 11–12. On the Esquiline Treasure, see Kent and Painter, eds, *Wealth of the Roman World*, pp. 44–9, nos. 88–98.

⁵⁹ Lanciani, *The Destruction*, pp. 63–4.

⁶⁰ Cameron, 'The Date'; and Salzman, *The Making*, pp. 80–1. Cf. a strong argument against such an identification by Shelton, 'The Esquiline Treasure', who dates the treasure's objects between the 330s and 370s.

⁶¹ For further details on this casket and its 'iconographic program' addressed to a female gaze, see Elsner, 'Genders of Viewing'.

landowner similar to monogrammatic signs carved in concurrent Roman catacombs. The four other tiles present a rectangular stamp with a more artistic combination of two box monograms, reminiscent of Pelegrina's graphic sign from the Esquiline Treasure: the first encodes the beginning of Phillipianus' cognomen (PHILIPPI) and the second provides a graphic form for its end (ANI)—with the depiction of a horsehead in between. The images of horses appear on other tile stamps in this villa, and it is possible that they visualized the landowner's or his father's nickname, *Philippus* meaning in Greek 'fond of horses'.⁶² Splitting the name into two monograms must have made this pun even more obvious for their viewers.

4.3. MONOGRAMS AS PROTECTIVE AND INTERCESSORY DEVICES

Several factors contributed to the late antique expansion of monograms outside their original sphere of usage as control marks. Firstly, changes in Roman onomastic practices facilitated the growing usage of Latin personal monograms in the third and especially fourth centuries. In the late Republican period, the traditional Roman full name comprised three or four elements—praenomen, nomen, cognomen, and occasionally agnomen—which were hardly possible to express in one monogram. But Roman onomastic practices drastically altered during the Early Imperial period. First, the praenomen lost its individualizing function, and its use rapidly declined from the mid-second century AD. The praenomen survived for longer among the senatorial aristocracy, but by the fourth century even they rarely mentioned it in their epigraphs. Secondly, after Caracalla's grant of Roman citizenship to all free people in the Roman empire in 212, all new citizens received the praenomen and nomen of their imperial benefactor, Marcus Aurelius. As a vast number of people in the empire and especially in Rome now had Aurelius as their nomen, it lost its identifying purpose during the third century. As a result of these developments, by the fourth century the praenomen and nomen became all but markers of status, while various cognomina of Latin and Greek origins, as well as Christian names which were treated as cognomina, developed into the main individualizing element in naming practices, especially among Christians.⁶³ Cognomina of this kind formed the basis for a single-name system that became typical of the early Middle Ages. It is these new single names that late antique personal monograms predominantly represent.

Secondly, belief in the Evil Eye and a fear of the misuse of personal names in 'magical' practices probably contributed in late antiquity to the spread of inscriptions where personal names were replaced by anonymous formulations such as 'whose name God/the Lord knows'.⁶⁴ Personal names needed to be protected, so

⁶² Wilson, 'Tile-stamps'.

⁶³ For further detailed discussion of this transformation, see Kajanto, *Onomastic Studies*; and Salway, 'What's in a Name?'.

⁶⁴ Roueché, 'Interpreting the Signs', pp. 229–30.

to speak, against adversaries. Since some late antique cursing spells targeted the performers of one of several competing circus factions, Charlotte Roueché invokes the same reasoning for the appearance of epigraphic monograms hiding the names of two circus factions, namely the Greens and the Blues, inscribed in the public spaces of late antique Ephesos and Aphrodisias.⁶⁵ Monograms could thus be deployed as visual devices either offering honours to, or preserving the memory of, factions or persons, whilst simultaneously protecting them from hostile agents. The same logic explains why some theatre seats in Aphrodisias were marked not with the full names of their owners but with their box monograms.⁶⁶

Monogrammatic devices were, of course, capable of guarding names not only from supernatural forces but also from threats presented by secular powers. For example, Fabio Troncarelli has suggested that the box monogram (Fig. 4.9e) carved on a luxurious marble tombstone found in Villareggia, currently in the Musei Civici in Pavia, hides the name of Anicius Manlius Severinus Boethius, a powerful Roman aristocrat executed on the order of King Theoderic in 524. The Ostrogothic king is known to have issued a *damnatio memoriae* against Boethius: any reference to the latter was forbidden in public spaces. If Troncarelli's attribution of that funerary slab is correct, the substitution of Boethius' name in his funerary epigraph *B[ene] M[erenti]* with the protective monogram *Severino* may have allowed its anonymous commissioner and creator to circumvent Theoderic's royal ban.⁶⁷

Thirdly, the fact that many personal monograms appeared on funeral *tabulae* in early Christian catacombs suggests that those who commissioned them believed their main audiences to be the deceased's closest relatives and, most importantly, the divine Lord. God already knew their names, since they were written in his Book of Life and in Heaven (Philippians, 4.3; and Luke, 10.20),⁶⁸ and He could therefore easily decipher monograms incomprehensible to passers-by. It is also noteworthy that personal monograms and christograms, the monogrammatic signs of the Lord, had similar functions in this funerary context. Similar usage of monograms can be traced in the early Byzantine context. For example, a silver paten from Benaki Museum produced between c.550 and 620 features a cruciform monogram of its donor, probably *ΜΑΡΙΑΣ* ('of Mary'), on its rim followed by a phrase common in early Byzantine epigraphics: 'In fulfilment of a vow of those whose names God knows' (*ΥΠΕΡ ΕΥΧΗΣ ΟΝ ΟΙΔΕΝ Ο Θ[ΕΟ]Σ ΤΑ ΟΝΟΜΑΤΑ*).⁶⁹ Mary's name was already known to God and thus could be encoded in a monogrammatic device approaching the divine at every Eucharistic ceremony the paten was used in.

⁶⁵ Roueché, 'Interpreting the Signs', pp. 223–5 and 231–3. For a detailed discussion of the four circus factions in imperial Rome and early Byzantium, and the special role of the Blues and Greens among them, see Cameron, *Circus Factions*.

⁶⁶ For examples, see Roueché, *Performers*, pp. 109–10, nos. 46.H.8iii and 46.H.9iii, plate XV.

⁶⁷ Troncarelli, 'Forbidden Memory', pp. 194–205.

⁶⁸ For more details, see Carratelli, '*Cuius nomen*'; Roueché, 'Interpreting the Signs', pp. 228–9, and note 33.

⁶⁹ Athens, Benaki Museum, inv. no. GE 31524; ICA, no. 200886. For more on this formula, see Ševčenko, 'Sion Treasure', pp. 41–2.

Finally, the growing popularity of monograms must have resulted from the widely shared late antique belief in the intercessory and protective powers of graphic signs, exemplified by the popularity of *characteres* and esoteric seals such as those drawn in the Bruce Codex.⁷⁰ A personal monogram on one third-century ring gem (Fig. 4.2e), for example, was framed by an *ouroboros* (a tail-devouring snake), an ancient symbol that also appeared on 'magical'/'Gnostic' gems often inscribed with 'magical' *characteres*.⁷¹ Any wish or request that addressed transcendent forces using a graphic sign was thus perceived to have a better chance of reaching its goals. Christians of the late antique world shared in this perception, and Carlo Carletti has argued that early Christians employed the PE acclamatory monogram, discussed above, as an evocative 'ideogram' with 'magical' (amuletic) properties.⁷² The same belief in the intercessory and empowering qualities of monogrammatic devices might have encouraged Filocalus to design his acclamatory monogram and place it on the opening page of the *Calendar of 354*.

The latter can also be interpreted as a precursor of monogrammatic devices found across the Eastern Mediterranean in the fifth and sixth centuries, namely, intercessory monograms asking God to protect certain individuals and the acclamatory monograms carved by supporters of circus factions. Samples of the latter monograms have been discovered in Aphrodisias and Ephesos. Some of these monograms only hide the name of a faction in the genitive—the Greens (*Πρασίνων*) or the Blues (*Βενέτων*)—with the rest of the phrase spelled out in an epigraph. Others encode the entire or abbreviated acclamation: 'The fortune of the Greens triumphs!' (*νικᾷ ἡ τύχη τῶν Πρασίνων*) (Figs 4.9d and 4.11). All appeared in public settings in the period from the mid-fifth century to the early seventh, on seats in the amphitheatre of Aphrodisias,⁷³ and on marble columns and blocks in the central streets of both Aphrodisias and Ephesos. Charlotte Roueché argues that monograms were carved onto stone as visual records of the acclamations recited during ceremonies performed by these competing factions.⁷⁴ The act of encoding in stone either the whole acclamatory phrase or just the name of the faction on whose behalf the acclamation had been carved were probably perceived as a means of expanding its repetitive power into the future and, hence, increasing its intercessory qualities.

Similar perceptions, as well as an increasing belief in the miraculous powers of the sign of the cross, gave birth to invocational cruciform monograms that requested divine assistance and protection, and from the sixth century onwards these became a common occurrence on early Byzantine seals and other material media.

⁷⁰ For more details, see Chapter 1.

⁷¹ Spier, *Late Antique and Early Christian Gems*, p. 193 and no. M14.

⁷² Carletti, 'Un monogramma', p. 142.

⁷³ Roueché, *Performers*, p. 105, nos. 46.E.9 and 46.E.11, plate XIV.

⁷⁴ Roueché, 'Looking for Late Antique Ceremonial', nos. 12–13; Roueché, 'Interpreting the Signs', pp. 223–5 and 231–2, figs 1–2; and Roueché, *Aphrodisias*, nos. 185–6.

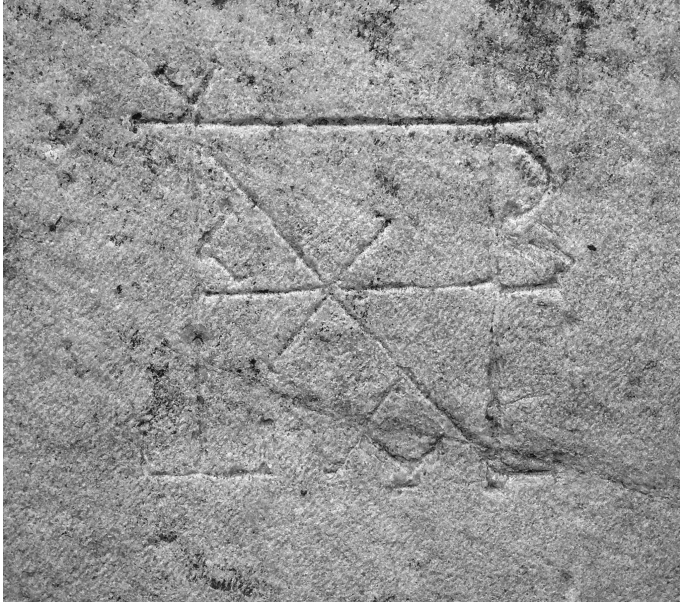


Fig. 4.11. Acclamatory monogram from Aphrodisias, *νικᾷ ἡ τύχη τῶν Πρασίνων*. Photo by Ine Jacobs.

4.4. THE CONTEMPLATIVE PROCESS INVOLVED IN UNDERSTANDING MONOGRAMS AND LATE ANTIQUE NEOPLATONISM

In one of his letters written in the years before 395, the Roman noble Quintus Aurelius Symmachus asked his friend, Nicomachus Flavianus Senior, whether or not he had received all of Symmachus' letters, which were sealed with a signet-ring on which the latter's name 'was presented more to be understood (grasped mentally) than to be read' (*magis intellegi quam legi promptum est*).⁷⁵ Symmachus thus conceived of his seal as both a practical means of authentication and as a form of protection against epistolary espionage, and his monogram therefore functioned in his eyes as a quasi-control mark confirming the integrity of the letter within. Yet Symmachus' description of that graphic device also seems to reflect a much wider late antique perception of monograms. The verb '*intellegere*'—usually translated as 'to perceive, grasp mentally, understand, and comprehend'—is juxtaposed in that phrase by Symmachus with '*legere*' (to read), demonstrating that for a late antique

⁷⁵ 'Non minore sane cura cupio cognoscere, an omnes obsignatas epistolas meas sumpseris eo anulo, quo nomen meum magis intellegi quam legi promptum est', Quintus Aurelius Symmachus, *Epistolae*, 2. 12, ed. Seeck, p. 46. On the nature of the second book of his letters and that letter in particular, see Sogno, *Q. Aurelius Symmachus*, pp. 61–3.

viewer the process of decoding a monogram was quite different from that of reading. In other words, the creators of late antique monograms expected their viewer to understand or mentally grasp the monogram through a contemplative process in which the visual extralinguistic properties of monograms and their linguistic content were held to be equally meaningful.

Such a contemplative approach to late antique monograms was also encouraged by the contemporary belief in the intimate relationship between letters and the atomic elements of the world.⁷⁶ It is noteworthy that the Greek word *στοιχείον* described both alphabetical letters and physical elements. This belief contributed to the active usage in late antiquity of 'magical' characters, pseudo-letters linked to primordial cosmic elements. The same belief also explains the appearance of the myth describing the creation of the world from alphabetical letters, which can be traced in Jewish, Christian, and 'Gnostic' texts.⁷⁷ One of them, *The Mystery of the Greek Letters*, written by a sixth-century Melkite monk in Palestine and ascribed to St Saba, even contended that these letters incorporated the archetypes and figures ('*τοὺς τύπους καὶ τὰ σχήματα*') of the elements in the created world.⁷⁸ This perceived connection of letters to the inner structure of world must have been all the more apparent when letters were taken out of their common linguistic context and assembled in monograms defying the process of reading. As pointed out by Tzahi Weiss with reference to Jacques Lacan's psychoanalytic theory, 'reading individual letters, or combinations of letters that do not form words, causes a cognitive break stemming from the amputation of the normative process of interpretation'.⁷⁹ In the context of a contemplative process resulting from such a cognitive break, the viewer of a monogram was left with its visual structure in search for deeper meanings.

The shape late antique monograms took and the manner in which letters were combined were therefore of considerable importance. Many monograms deployed the Latin and Greek letters N, M, H, and Π to create a square-like main frame, to which other letters were then attached. The choice of these letters for monograms' bases was likely connected to their resemblance to certain 'magical' characters: monograms could thus function as a kind of protective seal against evil forces. But the shape of box monograms was also compatible with early Christian exegetical symbolism, and Clement of Alexandria appropriated some Platonic ideas in his *Stromata* at the turn of the third century, particularly in his comments regarding the geometric symbolism of the tabernacle, which he states was 'constructed in most regular proportions, and through divine ideas, by the gift of understanding, which leads us from things of sense to intellectual objects, or rather from these to holy things, and to the holy of holies. For the squares of wood indicate that the square form, producing right angles, pervades all, and points out security'.⁸⁰

⁷⁶ Dornseiff, *Das Alphabet*.

⁷⁷ For further details, see Weiss, 'On the Matter of Language'.

⁷⁸ *Der Traktat 'Vom Mysterium der Buchstaben'*, ed. Bandt, pp. 106–7. See also Stroumsa, 'The Mystery'.

⁷⁹ Weiss, 'On the Matter of Language', p. 114.

⁸⁰ Clement of Alexandria, *The Stromata*, 6. 11, p. 500. For the influence of Platonism on Clement's views, see Attridge, 'What Gnostics Knew', p. 12.

Just as a monogram's shape might have carried a hidden meaning, the late antique intellectual could also discern an arcane meaning in its structure, revealed through contemplation of the monogrammatic device in the *Calendar of 354*. Letter by letter, its decoding can only be achieved if an observer enacts a circular counter-clockwise eye movement around the inside of the monogram's O-shaped medallion. It is possible that, by such an arrangement of letters, Filocalus hinted at the kinetic properties of the human soul that were repeatedly mentioned in works of late antique Neoplatonism and their Christian adaptors as something that brought the soul closer to the divine. It was well known to the third-century Neoplatonist Plotinus that the soul's motion was circular,⁸¹ and the early sixth-century Christian theologian known as Pseudo-Dionysius described the very same movement as an attribute that united the human soul and divine properties. According to Pseudo-Dionysius, the soul rotated in a manner similar to the divine intelligences, which were derived from the Good and the Beautiful and moved in an endless circle.

First it [the soul] moves in a circle, that is, it turns within itself and away from what is outside and there is an inner concentration of its intellectual powers. A sort of fixed revolution causes it to return from the multiplicity of externals, to gather in upon itself and then, in this undispersed condition, to join those who are themselves in a powerful union. From there the revolution brings the soul to the Beautiful and the Good, which is beyond all things, is one and the same, and has neither beginning nor end.⁸²

Ideas of this nature were most likely known to fourth-century intellectuals including the calligrapher Filocalus and the Roman noble Valentinus, and the revolving, performative nature of the dedication monogram in the *Calendar of 354* might have presented Filocalus' interpretation of the expression *floreas in Deo*, whereby the human soul ascended to the divine, which 'has neither beginning nor end'.

The introductory monogrammatic medallion, which honoured Valentinus with his name-image instead of a figural image, should also be interpreted as representative of a new late antique mode of showing the true human nature. This practice can be traced in both Christian and Neoplatonic writings. Thus, Clement of Alexandria wrote in his *Exhortation to the Heathen*:

For the image of God is His Word, the genuine Son of Mind, the Divine Word, the archetypal light of light; and the image of the Word is the true man, the mind of which is in man, who is therefore said to have been made 'in the image and likeness of God', assimilated to the Divine Word in the affection of the soul, and therefore rational; but effigies sculptured in human form, the earthly image of that part of man which is visible and earth-born, are but a perishable impress of humanity, manifestly wide of the truth.⁸³

Around the turn of the fifth century, Paulinus of Nola outlined a similar cognitive path while asserting that heavenly secrets and divine truth could only be seen through

⁸¹ Smith, 'Physics', p. 533, with reference to Plotinus, *Enneads*, 4.2.

⁸² Pseudo-Dionysius, *The Divine Names*, 4. 8–9, p. 78.

⁸³ Clement of Alexandria, *Exhortation to the Heathen*, 10, p. 199.

the mind's eye and spurning various forms and appearances of the real world.⁸⁴ Later in that century, the renowned Neoplatonist Proclus made a statement on the true human nature somewhat similar to that of Clement:

Consequently, if names are images in words of the objects to which they apply, they refer primarily to immaterial Forms, and derivatively to sensible things, so that things in this world derive both their being and designation from that world. . . . For example, when we speak of man, i.e. use the term 'man', we use it in one sense as an image of the divine Form and in another sense when we refer to a visible man. . . . For 'man' is not an ambiguous term in the sense of a bare name applied to two different things, but as being primarily a likeness of the intelligible reality, and secondarily of the sensible thing; for this reason man is not the same thing when we are speaking of the intelligible as when we refer to the sensible man. In the one case it is the likeness of the divine object, in the other the likeness of the sensible individual.⁸⁵

When set in the context of this late antique intellectual worldview, so dominated by the dichotomy of the sensible/earthly *mundus* and the intelligible/divine world, the dedication monogram reveals itself as Filocalus' attempt to present the true image of Valentinus in 'a likeness of the intelligible reality' and 'assimilated to the Divine Word'. In this attempt, the late Roman calligrapher behaved in a similar manner to those early Christians who employed graphic name-images to identify themselves on funerary *tabulae*. On the threshold to the other world, where the soul would leave the trappings of the human body, Christians identified themselves using monogrammatic devices similar to graphic representations of their divine Lord as Logos: christograms. In this context, it is hardly accidental that in the fourth and fifth centuries these graphic signs of Christ and personal monograms often appeared in similar contexts, and began to share some formal attributes including medallion settings or laurel wreath frames.

The new monogrammatic trend in late antique visual communication, exemplified by the *Calendar of 354* and extant funerary epigraphy in the Roman catacombs, fully manifested itself in the fifth and sixth centuries, when various monograms appeared in a much wider range of media to represent aristocrats as well as figures of authority, namely emperors, kings, and bishops.

⁸⁴ '...et nunc spe sequimur quod mente videmus, spernentes varias, rerum spectacula, formas...', Paulinus of Nola, *Carmina*, ed. Dolveck, p. 537. For further discussion of this late antique cognitive mode exemplified by Paulinus of Nola, see de Nie, "Divinos Concipe Sensus", pp. 77–92. For a broader discussion of the early medieval tradition of seeing with the mind's eye from Augustine to Alcuin, see Noble, 'The Vocabulary of Vision'.

⁸⁵ Proclus's *Commentary on Plato's Parmenides*, 4. 851, pp. 220–1.

5

Secular Monograms, Social Status, and Authority in the Late Roman World and Early Byzantium

The dedication text in the *Calendar of 354* and the archaeological context of the plates from the Esquiline Treasure allow scholars to decipher the monograms of two Roman nobles, Valentinus and Pelegrina Turcia. The task of decoding such signs becomes more challenging when any accompanying text or broader context are all but absent, as in the case of the so-called *Consecratio* panel produced in Rome or northern Italy at the beginning or in the first half of the fifth century. Art historians have interpreted the iconography of this carved ivory panel, which originally constituted a leaf of a diptych, as representing either the consecration of a deceased emperor or the apotheosis of a pagan philosopher.¹ A medallion at the top of the panel features a box monogram (Fig. 5.1), the meaning of which is still debated. In the 1930s, Edmund Weigand interpreted it as SYMMACHORUM, and in doing so connected the panel to the prominent homonymous Roman noble family, the Symmachi.² Most specialists of late antiquity have accepted his interpretation, and have consequently associated the production of the ivory with the commemoration of Quintus Aurelius Symmachus' death in 402. The latter was known to be a staunch pagan, and used a monogram to seal his letters.³ Weigand's interpretation is nevertheless open to questioning on two points. Firstly, it would have been highly unusual in the fourth and fifth centuries to employ a monogram to express a family cognomen using a plural genitive. When personal names were encoded in this period, they normally took a singular form. Secondly, David Wright has disputed the notion that the monogrammatic sign on the ivory includes a letter S, and hence has questioned the latter's connection to the Symmachi.⁴ Contrary to Weigand, he has stated that the letter C and the upper curve of the letter R do not intersect entirely, and thus cannot be interpreted as creating a composite letter S.

¹ St. Clair, 'The Apotheosis Diptych'; Volbach, *Elfenbeinarbeiten*, p. 52, no. 56; Wetzmann, ed., *Age of Spirituality*, pp. 70–1, no. 60; MacCormack, *Art and Ceremony*, pp. 141–3; Cameron, *The Later Roman Empire*, pp. 160–1; Buckton, ed., *Byzantium*, pp. 57–8, no. 44.

² Weigand, 'Ein bisher verkanntes Diptychon'.

³ See Chapter 4.

⁴ Wright, 'The Persistence', pp. 359–60. He sets the panel instead within a mid-fifth-century imperial context.



Fig. 5.1. *Consecratio* panel, upper part. London, BrM, reg. no. 1857,1013.1. © The Trustees of the British Museum.

A close-up inspection of the upper left corner of that graphic device cannot exclude conclusively either of these two interpretations.⁵

Despite its arcane nature, the monogrammatic sign on the *Consecratio* panel reveals an important social function that many late antique aristocratic monograms fulfilled. Julius Victor stated in his *Ars rhetorica* that cryptic language is permissible among close acquaintances who are able to understand it, using an obscure code which they agree upon.⁶ The above monograms operated as just such

⁵ See, for example, Cameron, *The Last Pagans*, pp. 719–28, especially at pp. 721–2, who admits Wright's point, but insists on Weigand's reading of a superscript C and the curved element of R in that monogram as intended to convey the missing letter S—an attempt that failed due to the difficulties associated with carving on a hard material like ivory.

⁶ Malherbe, ed., *Ancient Epistolary Theorists*, pp. 62–3.

a cryptic quasi-language: they encoded meanings decipherable only within narrow circles of noble donors, recipients, owners, and wearers of prestige objects, and were obscure to people on the outside. Such graphic devices concealed personal names from uninvited gazes, but were easily understood within the social and family environments inhabited by those whose names such monograms encrypted. Late antique monograms thus increased social cohesion by establishing visual borders to outsiders. Only people within restricted social networks of power and affluence, familiar with each other's names and proficient in a shared code of monogrammatic calligraphy, were able to decipher such monogrammatic signs, and this sociocultural ability set them apart from everybody else.

Whilst the precise meaning of the graphic sign on the *Consecratio* panel remains a mystery, its form exhibits the same principles of graphic composition as the contemporary monograms discussed in the previous chapter. Like the Rusticius monogram from the Catacombs of Priscilla (Fig. 4.4c), this graphic sign has a superscript C attached to the monogram's left base; like Valentinus' monogram, it features a superscript V above the monogram's right base. Such similarities corroborate the existence of a shared calligraphic culture, which gradually influenced the manner in which late Roman aristocrats could express their social status and group identity on portable luxury objects such as silverware and ivory diptychs, a practice attested from the late fourth century onwards.⁷ At the turn of the fifth century this practice was still new, and Quintus Aurelius Symmachus had to explain to a close friend the purpose of the personal monogram he employed to seal letters. Over the course of the fifth and sixth centuries, this practice became more widespread in both the Latin West and Greek East, and its use expanded to include mass-produced objects associated with emperorship and, later, kingship, namely coinage. In this medium, imperial and royal monograms became graphic signs of authority addressed to people from various walks of life who handled copper and, later, silver coins.

5.1. THE NUMISMATIC MONOGRAM OF THEODOSIUS II: MONOGRAMS AS SIGNS OF IMPERIAL AUTHORITY IN THE MIDDLE AND SECOND HALF OF THE FIFTH CENTURY

The personal monograms that emperors began to place on imperial copper coins in the middle and second half of the fifth century differed from the monogrammatic stamps on Hellenistic coins. The latter functioned as auxiliary signs of producers, devoid of any symbolic value. The practice of using such monogrammatic control marks, made of several letters, continued in the Greek East throughout late antiquity, and is found, for example, on marble elements carved in Proconnesus near

⁷ On portable luxury goods as a material expression of shared aristocratic culture in this period, see Stirling, 'Prolegomena to the Study'.



Fig. 5.2. Copper coin of Theodosius II, Ae4 (Nicomedia, c.445–50). Oslo University, Museum of Cultural History.

Constantinople.⁸ In contrast, the monograms on fifth-century copper coins employed all the letters of imperial names, and became a popular reverse type alongside *vota* legends and the sign of the cross. To underscore their symbolic nature, a laurel wreath framed each of these numismatic types (Fig. 5.2). The obverse of copper coins that displayed a monogrammatic reverse featured the imperial title legend and imperial profile bust. In other words, imperial monograms did not replace the legends naming emperors through literacy. Nor did they replace the imperial profile bust, a traditional figural symbol of imperial authority. They provided, instead, an alternative symbolic reference through graphicacy, and this symbolic aspect connects the numismatic imperial monograms to fourth- and fifth-century calligraphic culture. Furthermore, like earlier monograms on luxury objects and in early Christian catacombs, numismatic monograms were constructed around a box frame provided by the letters H, M, or N, and spelled personal names in the genitive case.

It is more than mere coincidence that the imperial monogram was introduced onto late Roman coinage in the reign of Theodosius II (408–50); the emperor was no stranger to late antique calligraphic culture. He underwent a rigorous course of study in the liberal arts during his childhood, and his commissions of works from such a calligrapher as Aemilius Probus clearly reveal his personal fondness for calligraphic art.⁹ Significantly, the emperor himself regularly honed his calligraphic skills, and for that reason was nicknamed ‘Calligrapher’ (καλλιγράφος) by later Byzantine authors.¹⁰ Theodosius is known, for instance, for copying manuscripts of Solinus.¹¹ This predilection for calligraphic culture at the Constantinopolitan

⁸ For more details and references, see Chapter 6, especially note 25.

⁹ Cameron, ‘Petronius Probus’; Cameron, *The Last Pagans*, p. 434; Salway, ‘The Nature and Genesis’, p. 128.

¹⁰ George the Monk, *Chronicon*, ed. de Boor and Wirth, vol. 2, p. 604; Glykas, *Annales*, 4.260, ed. Migne, col. 488C.

¹¹ Cameron, ‘Petronius Probus’, p. 126 and note 35.

court of Theodosius provides a historical backdrop for the introduction of the first imperial monogram on copper coins in the last years of his reign (c.445–50).

The monogrammatic sign of Theodosius was introduced on the smallest denomination of copper coinage (Fig. 5.2), commonly referred to as Ae4.¹² They were issued at the two mints closest to the imperial court, namely Constantinople and Nicomedia;¹³ the latter mint lay approximately 116 km away from the imperial capital. The monogram placed on copper coins at these two mints exhibits a uniform design, which suggests that this monogrammatic sign must have been created at the imperial court, perhaps by the emperor himself.

Theodosius' graphic device combines the Latin letters T and H with Greek delta and sigma. Two remaining letters can be deciphered as either Latin E and O or Greek epsilon and omicron. These letters probably present the imperial name in the Latin genitive, THEOΔOCII,¹⁴ a practice that became customary for personal monograms at that time. The peculiar mixture of Latin and Greek letters in the imperial monogrammatic sign might have been intentional. After all, Latin represented the language of administration in the Eastern Roman empire, whilst Greek remained the default language of communication for the vast majority of the population. Nevertheless, the obverse of these coins only employed Latin letters to spell the imperial name (Fig. 5.2), THEODOSIUS. Calligraphic considerations must therefore have been of some importance.

The letter S always caused a problem for late antique designers of monograms. Due to its curved outline, it could not be incorporated into the straight lines of a box frame like other letters. Consequently, it was usually placed in an upper or lower monogrammatic field (Figs 4.4e, 4.4f, 4.8, and 4.9a). In contrast, a sigma could be incorporated into one of the vertical bars constituting a monogrammatic box. In the case of Theodosius' monogram, a sigma is combined with an E. Turning to the Latin letter D, its default location in contemporary monograms was on one of their vertical bars. In Theodosius' graphic device, in contrast, a capital delta could only be placed underneath the former's horizontal bar. Was it the letter's location that prompted the choice of the Greek letter? The act of decoding the monogram starts with an eye movement from left to right, following the first three letters THE. The next two letters, OA, require an eye movement to be made from the top to the bottom of the graphic device. The eye movements thus follow two lines to create a sign of the cross, the veneration of which flourished precisely during the reign of Theodosius II, to the extent that it had become the primary Christian symbol in the late Roman world by the end of his reign, and appeared across various media including coinage.¹⁵ It is also hardly accidental that the copper coins using the sign of the cross as a blueprint to create Theodosius' monogram replaced a similar issue with the sign of the cross as its reverse type; the visible cross was thus substituted for a cross hidden within the structure of the imperial monogram.

¹² Grierson and Mays, *Catalogue*, pp. 88 and 148; CBC, vol. 2, p. 107; Hahn, *Die Ostprägung*, p. 35; RIC, vol. 10, p. 93.

¹³ Grierson and Mays, *Catalogue*, p. 148.

¹⁴ Cf. Woods, 'A Misunderstood Monogram', pp. 10–12.

¹⁵ For more details, see Chapter 3.

Theodosius' calligraphic device was crafted in the last years of his reign, when his wife Eudocia left Constantinople for a pious life in the Holy Land, and when his equally pious sister Pulcheria withdrew from the Great Palace in the city centre to the suburban Hebdoman Palace. Abandoned by the two most influential women in his adult life, Theodosius consequently lived a life of chastity and Christian observance in the 440s,¹⁶ and his monogram that appeared on the lowest denomination of copper coinage, issued for circulation in Constantinople and its hinterland, propagated the graphic message of a Christian emperor equal in piety to his imperial sister and spouse. Speaking more broadly, the Theodosian numismatic innovation bears witness to the growing popularity of personal monograms as signs of aristocratic identity and social power in the fifth century, and signalled a new trend towards the incorporation of monogrammatic signs into the visual pageantry of imperial authority, a historical trend that would reach maturity in the sixth century.

In the second half of the fifth century, a number of Eastern Roman emperors—Marcian (450–7), Leo I (457–74), Zeno (474–5 and 476–91), Basiliscus (475–6), and Anastasius I (491–518)—continued the practice of placing their monograms on the lowest denomination of coins in circulation (Fig. 5.3a–c), which in the years before the monetary reform of Anastasius in 498 were the only copper coins issued at the imperial mints.¹⁷ None of the above emperors had been a legitimate male heir of the preceding emperor, and none had risen from the ranks of the traditional aristocracy of Constantinople. Their ascendance to imperial power was instead validated in each case by marriage to an imperial widow or female relative of a preceding emperor. In this context of dubious legitimacy, the continuation of the main types of Theodosian coinage, including his monogrammatic type, aimed to propagate the same message as that communicated by the matrimonial unions: an unbroken line of legitimate imperial rulers following the Theodosian dynasty in Constantinople. These box monograms, spelling the name of the emperor in Latin, lacked the calligraphic excellence of Theodosius' monogrammatic device.

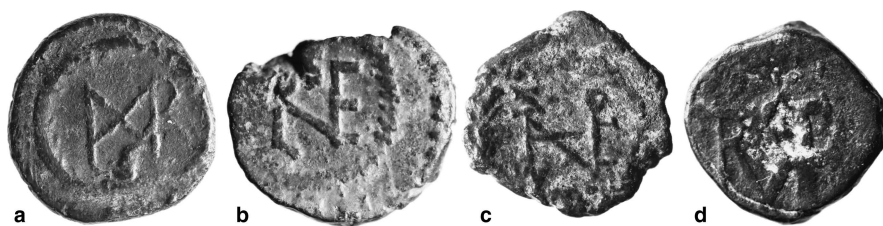


Fig. 5.3. Monogrammatic reverses of late Roman copper coins, Ae4: a) of Marcian (450–7); b) of Leo I (457–74); c) of Zeno (474–91); d) of Libius Severus (461–5). Oslo University, Museum of Cultural History, and Princeton University Numismatic Collection, Department of Rare Books and Special Collections, Firestone Library.

¹⁶ Holum, *Theodosian Emperresses*, pp. 81 and 176–94.

¹⁷ Grierson and Mays, *Catalogue*, pp. 158 (for Marcian), 164–6 (for Leo), 178–9 (for Basiliscus and Marcus), and 183 (for Zeno); CBC, vol. 1, pp. 11–12 (for the pre-reform bronze coinage of Anastasius); Schindel, 'Ein Minimus' (for Basiliscus).

Yet calligraphy was the least of their creators' concerns; such imperial signs were designed to highlight graphically the smooth continuity of emperorship after Theodosius II and, at the same time, to allow their viewers to differentiate between the monogrammatic coins of different emperors, even when such coins were in bad condition (Fig. 5.3b–c). Although many coin users might not have been able to decipher such monograms, the silhouette of each monogram must have been memorized as the graphic sign of a specific emperor soon after its introduction, and would be easily recognized thereafter.

The Theodosian innovation also appealed to Western Roman rulers, and the last western emperors Libius Severus (461–5),¹⁸ Anthemius (467–72),¹⁹ and probably Julius Nepos (474–5, 476–80),²⁰ placed their box monograms on the lowest denominations (Ae3 and Ae4) of their copper coins cast in Italian mints (Fig. 5.3d). With the demise of Western Roman emperorship, the practice of placing the monogrammatic signs of authority on coins was adopted by the first barbarian king in Italy, Odovacar (476–93). His box monogram appears on copper nummi and silver half-siliquae.²¹ Both are extremely rare and were struck in the Western Roman imperial capital of Ravenna. They were most likely issued in the last years of his rule, c.489–93, when the Ostrogothic troops of Theoderic invaded northern Italy with the consent of Emperor Zeno and besieged Odovacar in Ravenna. In his precarious situation, Odovacar was forced to claim authority independent from the Byzantine emperors. As a result, he not only appropriated the imperial box monogram on his coins, but also added to his title legend the appellation *Flavius*, used by contemporary emperors such as Zeno and Anastasius I.

Odovacar's appropriation of imperial visual symbols of authority was followed by the adoption of a monogrammatic reverse type on Ostrogothic royal coinage and by Anastasius' reform of Byzantine copper coinage in 498,²² which confined the earlier monogrammatic reverse type to the lowest denomination of bronze coins—known among numismatists as *minimi*—and introduced heavier copper folles (forty nummi) and its fractions.²³ On these new Byzantine coins, a Greek letter-number denoting the numeric value of a specific fraction (M = 40, K = 20, I = 10, and E = 5) became the default reverse type. Imperial monograms also appeared occasionally on rare pentanummia (five nummi) issued at Antioch in the reigns of Justin I (518–27), Justinian I (527–65), and Justin II (565–78),²⁴ and pentanummia with the monogram of this last emperor were cast in Carthage.²⁵

¹⁸ For a hypothetical monogram of Recimer, see Grierson and Mays, *Catalogue*, p. 254; RIC, vol. 10, pp. 190–1; MacGeorge, *Late Roman Warlords*, pp. 218–22. For its attribution to Libius Severus, see Woods, 'A Misunderstood Monogram', pp. 6–10 and 18–19.

¹⁹ Grierson and Mays, *Catalogue*, pp. 259; RIC, vol. 10, p. 198.

²⁰ RIC, vol. 10, pp. 206 and 430.

²¹ RIC, vol. 10, pp. 213–14, MEC, nos. 1.63–64.

²² Bellinger, 'The Copper of Anastasius I'; Nicks, *The Reign of Anastasius I*, pp. 233–8; and Hahn and Metlich, *Money*, pp. 13–15. On the continuation of monogrammatic *minimi* after Anastasius' reform, see Schindel, 'Zur Minimusprägung'.

²³ For more details, see Chapter 7.

²⁴ Hahn and Metlich, *Money*, p. 37; Justin I (522–7), nos. N67 and NN67; Justinian I, no. 163; CBC, vol. 1, p. 154 (Justinian I in 560–5), pp. 218, 226, 234, 240, and 250 (Justin II).

²⁵ CBC, vol. 1, pp. 242 and 254.



Fig. 5.4. Pentanummi of Justin II and Sophia (Antioch, 565–78). Princeton University Numismatic Collection, Department of Rare Books and Special Collections, Firestone Library.

Yet on the pentanummi of Justin II produced at Antioch, the imperial monogrammatic sign of the emperor and his wife Sophia was employed in an entirely different manner when compared to the fifth- and sixth-century copper coins of lower denominations: it replaced the imperial bust and title legend on the obverse (Fig. 5.4), and became the only imperial attribute or identifier on such coins. This modification reflected a sixth-century change in the use of imperial monograms on coinage, whereby they could function as graphic symbols of emperorship as well as of high-ranking imperial offices, as they did on late Roman and Byzantine weights, silverware, and bricks from the second half of the fifth to the mid-seventh centuries.

5.2. MONOGRAMS AS SIGNS OF AUTHORITY ON SILVERWARE, WEIGHTS, BRICKS, AND CONSULAR DIPTYCHS

While imperial monograms were limited only to the lowest denominations of Byzantine copper coinage after Anastasius' monetary reform of 498, they began to be employed as control stamps on some early Byzantine silverware, and this usage continued until c.651. Such stamps were applied at imperial workshops—definitely in Constantinople and probably in some provincial capitals—although scholars disagree on the purpose of these stamps and the stage of production at which they were applied.²⁶ As issues of silver coinage in the sixth and early seventh centuries were rare,²⁷ silverware functioned as a form of state-produced symbolic silver bullion.

²⁶ Dodd, *Byzantine Silver Stamps*, pp. 35–45; Dodd, 'Byzantine Silver Stamps: Supplement I', p. 244; Dodd, 'Byzantine Silver Stamps: Supplement II', p. 148; Dodd, 'Evidence of the Stamps', especially note 17; Feissel, 'Le Préfet'; Nesbitt, 'Some Observations'; cf. Mundell Mango, 'The Purpose and Places', pp. 214–15; Mundell Mango, 'Continuity', p. 85; Mundell Mango, 'Metalwork', pp. 446–7.

²⁷ Hahn and Metlich, *Money*, pp. 95–6 (Justin I, Constantinople) and pp. 120–6 (Justinian I, Constantinople, Thessalonica, Carthage, Rome, and Ravenna). This evidence contradicts Mundell

Hence, similar to contemporary numismatic designs, its more or less regular control system of five stamps included imperial portraits, a type of imperial stamp that appeared on gold and silver objects from as early as the fourth century AD.²⁸ Furthermore, sixth-century stamps featured not only imperial monograms but also personal monograms of the highest level of Byzantine officials, such as the *comites sacrarum largitionum*, who supervised the minting of gold and silver coins, and the urban prefects of Constantinople, who controlled weights. In contrast, the names of lower officials were expressed by inscription stamps, which underscores the concept that monograms on this medium were reserved for the use of emperors and top imperial dignitaries in charge of the production of silver objects. Such monogrammatic stamps therefore served as graphic symbols of imperial authority guaranteeing the purity of the material they were stamped on. In a similar capacity, imperial monograms reappear on seventh-century imperial coins, either as auxiliary signs in the field of a coin (Fig. 3.9) or as countermarks validating the use of older copper coins. Such usage was discontinued in the Byzantine East after 685, while in the West imperial monogrammatic stamps were employed in Carthage and Syracuse until 698 and 720 respectively.²⁹

The monograms of emperors and imperial officials appeared on commodity and coin weights that were produced under their authority from the second half of the fifth century, and their graphic signs conveyed the same validating power as monogrammatic stamps on silverware. The earliest monograms introduced onto metal coin weights appeared approximately at the same time as those introduced onto coinage. Several surviving solidi weights of the emperors Marcian and Leo I feature on their reverses imperial monograms identical to those used in copper coinage, with an imperial bust similarly adorning their front sides.³⁰ On weights, monogrammatic signs of imperial officials most likely replaced imperial monograms in the late fifth century, probably during the monetary and weight reforms of Anastasius I. From that time onwards, monograms that were placed on weights (primarily made of copper-alloy and glass) encoded the names of *comites sacrarum largitionum*, praetorian and urban prefects/eparchs, and various *comites*.³¹ Yet these imperial officials might not account for the vast variety of monograms employed on sixth- and seventh-century weights, and Chris Entwistle has argued that many monogrammatic signs on copper-alloy weights identified their owners: merchants and other people who needed them for private use.³² Most monograms of this sort

Mango's assertion that '[s]ilver was not coined in the eastern empire between about 400 and 615': 'Metalwork', p. 446.

²⁸ Dodd, *Byzantine Silver Stamps*, pp. 3–4.

²⁹ CBC, vol. 3, p. 267.

³⁰ Bendall, *Byzantine Weights*, nos. 15–16. Also, a unique semissis/weight of gold was sold at an auction in 1988, with a monogram of Marcian on the obverse and the figure of Moneta on the reverse (Bendall, *Byzantine Weights*, no. 14). The image on the reverse and the object's round shape make it similar to the imperial weights of the late fourth and early fifth centuries. But it has the inscription CONOB under Moneta, which is typical of gold coins, since it confirms the purity of gold—a matter less important for a weight. Furthermore, the known solidi weights of Marcian have a different design.

³¹ Entwistle, 'Late Roman and Byzantine Weights', Buckton, ed., *Byzantium*, pp. 14–15 and 86–90.

³² Entwistle, *A Catalogue*, and pers. comm.

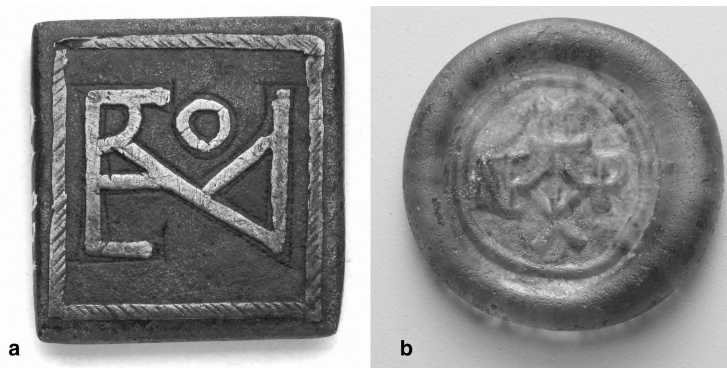


Fig. 5.5. Late antique weights with monograms: a) copper-alloy weight, London, BrM, reg. no. OA.821. © The Trustees of the British Museum; b) early Byzantine glass weight, New York, MMA, acc. no. 81.10.148.

are in Greek, which highlights the fact that their usage on weights was mostly confined to early Byzantium. Some of them are in Latin, which may indicate (although not definitively) their Italian origins, for example that on a square copper-alloy weight from the British Museum,³³ which presents the personal box monogram of an unknown official on its front (Fig. 5.5a), and his title *v(ir) c(larissimus)* on the back. Such a usage must have been short-lived in Italy where the latest dated square-shaped weight of the prefect Catulinus of Rome was cast during the reign of the Ostrogothic king Theoderic (493–526).³⁴ The use of box and cruciform monograms was especially common on glass weights (Fig. 5.5b), a feature resulting from the setting of their production in Egypt and Syria from the late fifth century until the 640s, when Muslim invasion disrupted the Byzantine system of the creation and distribution of these weights in those regions.³⁵

Glass weights can be compared to early Byzantine lead seals, where monogrammatic devices encoded the names of a much wider circle of imperial officials, dignitaries of state, and ecclesiastical hierarchs. Lead seals (in the form of the so-called conical seals) were already in use in the late Roman period, marked with figurative images and abbreviated title legends. But by the sixth century such seals began to feature monograms, initially of the box type (some of them can be seen on earlier conical seals) and from the seventh century onwards predominantly of the cruciform form—with the whole tradition of monogrammatic names on lead seals seemingly

³³ Reg. no. AO.821; Entwistle, *A Catalogue*, no. 149.

³⁴ BrM, reg. no. 1982.0105.1; Buckton, ed., *Byzantium*, nos. 78; Entwistle, *A Catalogue*, no. 182. Copper-alloy objects of the same shape were issued by prefects of Rome and praetorian prefects of Italy as early as the 420s, although scholars disagree on their function. RIC, vol. 10, pp. 9–10, has interpreted them as *solidi* weights, while others explain them as *tesserae monumentorum* placed on renovated buildings: Elvers, 'Zwei neue sog. tesserae monumentorum', pp. 204–5. None of them feature a monogram.

³⁵ Buckton, ed., *Byzantium*, p. 15; Bendall, *Byzantine Weights*, pp. 60–5; and Entwistle, 'Late Roman and Byzantine Weights', pp. 44–5; Tobias, 'Glass Weights', pp. 192–200.

falling out of fashion around the turn of the ninth century.³⁶ Although most of these seals, especially later ones, employed Greek monograms, rare specimens of Italian provenance featuring Latin box monograms are also known, for instance the sixth-century lead seal from Crypta Balbi in Rome with a personification of this imperial capital on one side and the box monogram of Anthemius on the other.³⁷ Unfortunately, many Byzantine lead seals belonging to lower imperial officials are hard to date precisely, and it is consequently difficult to ascertain how early their monogrammatic signs began to be employed in Byzantine sigillography. For example, the earliest specimen in the Dumbarton Oaks Database of Byzantine seals is dated to the fourth or fifth century. It has a Latin box monogram decoded as *Marianu*, with a chi-rho above, on one side and the person's title '*a secretis*' on the other.³⁸ The existing textual evidence meanwhile shows that this title referring to confidential secretaries began to be applied to imperial officials in the East from the last quarter of the fifth century onwards, which casts doubt on the seal's attribution to before the late fifth century.³⁹

Monograms are also attested on brickstamps employed in Constantinople from the early sixth century to the early seventh, a graphic feature that rendered them distinct from late Roman brickstamps.⁴⁰ Like the monogrammatic stamps placed on silverware and weights, some of these monograms expressed the names of emperors—principally Justinian I, Maurice (582–602), and Heraclius (610–41)—and some represented unknown individuals. Little is known about the organization of brick production in Constantinople, for instance whether or not some landowners had a public duty to provide authorities with a certain amount of bricks per annum, as seems to have been the case in Rome in the same period.⁴¹ In the Byzantine capital, bricks were probably produced in both imperial and 'private' workshops (*fuglinae*). The former must have stamped their output with imperial monograms, while the latter might have employed monogrammatic stamps to express the names of the people who owned these workshops, or were somehow in charge of their production.⁴² Two workshops that produced bricks in southern Italy probably in the second third of the sixth century—for the episcopal church of St Peter and adjacent episcopal palace in Canosa and for a rural church of St Justus in the Celone valley—provide comparable cases to Constantinopolitan 'private' *fuglinae*. The bricks in Canosa were stamped with the box monogram of the contemporary bishop Sabinus, the city's most powerful man, and they were most likely produced in his workshop.⁴³ The bricks for St Justus feature the box monogram IOHANNIS, which Giuliano Volpe has interpreted as referring to the *magister militum* John, a nephew of the general Vitalian (consul in the East in 520),

³⁶ Seibt, 'The Use of Monograms'; Metcalf, *Byzantine Seals*, pp. 185–301, 342–63, and 492–9; Nesbitt and Oikonomides, eds, *Catalogue*, vol. 5, nos. 22.5 and 47.1.

³⁷ Arena et al., eds, *Roma dall'antichità*, pp. 260–1, no. II. 2. 4.

³⁸ <http://www.doaks.org/resources/seals/byzantine-seals/BZS.1958.106.751>, accessed on 3 November 2016.

³⁹ Jones, Martindale, and Morris, *The Prosopography*, vol. 2, pp. 1267–8.

⁴⁰ On brick production and brickstamps in the late Roman empire, see Steinby, 'L'industria'.

⁴¹ Bardill, *Brickstamps*, vol. 1, pp. 13–14.

⁴² Bardill, *Brickstamps*, vol. 1, pp. 16–49.

⁴³ Volpe, 'Architecture', pp. 134–52.

who was dispatched to Italy during the Byzantine-Gothic wars. If this identification is correct, John could have functioned as a leading representative for Byzantine authorities in this region.⁴⁴

The evidence of coins, silverware, weights, and brickstamps thus shows that from the second half of the fifth century onwards monograms became a popular visual attribute of authority, first for emperors, slightly later for high-status imperial officials such as praetorian and urban prefects and *comites sacrarum largitionum*, and probably thereafter for lower imperial and ecclesiastical dignitaries. The evidence of consular diptychs, which were representative of another high-ranking imperial office, namely consulship, can illustrate this new graphic trend further. The iconography of such ivory diptychs is replete with symbols of authority and wealth, and when incised in this medium, consuls' monograms fulfilled the same symbolic function.

The tradition of carving ivory diptychs for consular inaugurations, and distributing them as commemorative gifts among noble peers, can be traced in written sources from as early as the late fourth century, while the surviving specimens (approximately four dozen have been identified so far) were produced in Rome and Constantinople from the beginning of the fifth century until 541,⁴⁵ a year after consulship had ceased to exist as a high-ranking imperial office separate from the figure of the emperor. Figural imagery dominates the visual appearance of these artefacts, destined for public display in the fifth century, and the earliest surviving monogram in that medium—of a rather simplistic form—only appears on the consular diptych of Boethius (Rome, 487).⁴⁶ On this diptych, a laurel wreath with garlands positioned at the centre of a triangular pediment above the consul's figure frames two letters of his name, BE, sharing one vertical bar.

The earliest Constantinopolitan ivory panels featuring consular monograms were produced for Areobindus in 506 and for Clementinus in 513. As in the case of the ivory panels of Boethius, a monogram on the diptych of Clementinus adorns a *clipeus* above the consul's figure, but it includes all the letters of his name in the Greek genitive, *KAHMENTINOY* (Fig. 5.6a).⁴⁷ Furthermore, its graphic structure is quite different from its Roman counterpart: the letters are attached to the end of an eight-armed cruciform device with an omicron at its middle. This monogram is interesting for three reasons. Firstly, the eight-armed graphic device became a powerful apotropaic sign in late antiquity: its graphic structure was employed in one of the most popular 'magical' *charactera* as well as the eight-armed Christian cross.

⁴⁴ Volpe, 'Linee di storia', pp. 341–3. Less clear is the person whose name is encoded by a box monogram stamp on Roman bricks probably in the sixth or early seventh century. It was deciphered as presenting the name of one of the popes called Boniface, whose pontificates belong to this period, or of a certain Beronicianus. Arena et al., eds, *Roma dall'antichità*, p. 226, no. I.10.6; Steinby, 'L'industria', p. 134; Bardill, *Brickstamps*, vol. 1, p. 16.

⁴⁵ Delbrueck, *Die Consulardiptychen*, nos. 1–22 and 26–34; Kinney, 'First-Generation Diptychs', p. 49; Olovdotter, 'Representing Consulship', pp. 99–101; Cameron, 'City Personifications'. Cameron, 'The Origin, Context', emphasizes the original connection of such ivory diptychs with any official who provided inaugural games, such as praetors earlier and, later, consuls.

⁴⁶ Volbach, *Elfenbeinarbeiten*, p. 32, no. 6; Olovdotter, *The Consular Image*, pp. 28–30, no. 6.

⁴⁷ Volbach, *Elfenbeinarbeiten*, p. 35, no. 15; Weitzmann, ed., *Age of Spirituality*, pp. 48–50, no. 48; Olovdotter, *The Consular Image*, pp. 44–7, no. 10.

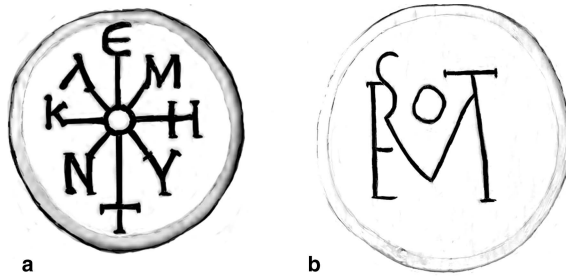


Fig. 5.6. Monograms from early sixth-century consular diptychs: a) from the consular diptych of Clementinus (Constantinople, 513); b) from the consular diptych of Orestes (Rome, 530).

Secondly, its quasi-cruciform shape predates the cruciform monograms of Justin I on his nummi cast in Antioch *c.* 522–7,⁴⁸ those of Justinian I on bricks stamped in 531/2, and those of Empress Theodora carved in Hagia Sophia *c.* 533 by approximately ten to twenty years;⁴⁹ Theodora's monogram has traditionally been referred to as one of the earliest cases of cruciform monograms, marking a new trend in early Byzantium probably starting in the 520–30s. Clementinus' quasi-cruciform monogram, meanwhile, mirrors the sign of the cross in the upper field of his diptych in a visual parallel that was most likely intentional, which suggests that the sign of the cross already started to influence the shapes of personal monograms in the Byzantine East in the early sixth century. Finally, the Greek monogram contrasts with a Latin inscription carved in a *tabula ansata* above. While the latter employs the contemporary official language of the Eastern Roman empire, the consul's monogram is similar to monogrammatic stamps on early Byzantine silverware, weights, and bricks in that it employs Greek, a language commonly used among Clementinus' noble acquaintances.

Clementinus' diptych is also noteworthy for the skilful combination of visualcy, literacy, and graphicacy in its public representation of the consul to noble recipients—through his figural image, the Latin inscription mentioning his name and titles, and finally, his Greek monogram. These were individualizing elements of consular portrayal that otherwise remained largely unchanged in this period. It is not surprising that when one of Clementinus' diptychs was re-used in 530 for a Roman noble named Orestes, consul in the West, Italian masters felt compelled to change only these three modes of representation. They re-carved the inscription as well as facial features in the figural image,⁵⁰ and replaced the original eight-armed monogram with a traditional Roman box monogram of Orestes in Latin

⁴⁸ These nummi were traditionally attributed to Justin II. But hoard evidence indicates that they were issued in the reign of Justin I; Phillips and Tyler-Smith, 'A Sixth-Century Hoard', pp. 318 and 322. Hahn and Metlich, *Money*, p. 37, suggest that the cruciform monogram might have been introduced at the beginning of a new indiction in 522.

⁴⁹ Bardill, *Brickstamps*, vol. 1, pp. 46–9. For more details on Theodora's cruciform monogram, see Chapter 6.

⁵⁰ Netzer, 'Redating'; Eastmond, 'Consular Diptychs', pp. 748 and 751. Cf. Olovsson, *The Consular Image*, pp. 30–4, no. 7. The frontal portraits of an imperial couple, Anastasius I and Ariadne, were also modified to represent an Ostrogothic royal couple, Athalaric and Amalasuentha.

(Fig. 5.6b),⁵¹ thus adapting the graphic mode of representation on these panels to the tastes of their sixth-century aristocratic audience in Ostrogothic Italy.

The importance of these three modes of consular representation most likely differed depending on the recipients of such ivories, as one can deduce from the visual appearance of diptychs that were produced to commemorate the consulship of the general Flavius Areobindus Dagalaifus in 506.⁵² Seven consular diptychs of Areobindus have survived to the present day, which mirrored the affluence of this consul and his noble wife, Anicia Juliana, and their privileged position in the eastern capital.⁵³ The designs of these panels divide them into three different groups that can also be detected across the surviving corpus of consular diptychs: firstly, a design defined by figural imagery (visualcy) (Fig. 5.7); secondly, a combination of the consular portrait of Areobindus in the central *clipeus* with two box monograms of his Greek name in the genitive, *Ἀρεοβίνδου*, surrounded by foliate ornament (Fig. 5.8); and finally, a design dominated by graphicacy, with the box Latin monogram AREOBINDUS at the middle with a small cross above it, both surrounded by the symbols of wealth and generosity (such as cornucopia and potent vines), and a Latin inscription framed by a *tabula ansata* on the top.⁵⁴ Antony Eastmond has demonstrated conclusively that these ivory panels employed different symbolic languages to display Areobindus' consular authority to different groups of noble recipients, with more abstract diptychs dispatched to the closest acquaintances.⁵⁵ People who belonged to that social circle were expected to decode the consul's Greek or Latin monograms easily and appreciate their calligraphic qualities. The family of Areobindus must have consciously chosen such graphic designs projecting his cultural sophistication, as evinced by the appearance of the marble piers (Fig. 6.1) produced for the church of St Polyeuktos that Areobindus' noble wife, Juliana Anicia, rebuilt in Constantinople in the following years. Like Areobindus' more abstract diptychs, these piers feature box monograms framed by foliate ornament.⁵⁶ Contemporary calligraphic graphicacy thus affected the visual aesthetics of this family and its cultural affiliations.

As pointed out by Eastmond, consular diptychs accompanied and authenticated the gifts of silver that newly appointed consuls bestowed on their peers.⁵⁷ In this role, these ivory panels are reminiscent of the stamps used to validate silver objects in that period, often by means of monograms. Late antique signet-rings fulfilled the same authenticating function, and by the sixth century personal monograms became their important visual attribute.

⁵¹ Volbach, *Elfenbeinarbeiten*, pp. 40–1, no. 31. Netzer, 'Redating', p. 266, suggests that the monogram shall be decoded as *ORESTES V[ir clarissimus]*. Yet it would be very unusual to encode that title in a monogram. Instead, the presence of a V in the monogram corresponds to a genitive form of that Greek name (*Ἀρεοβίνδου*), namely ORESTU. After all, Clementinus' name in the original was also given in a genitive case.

⁵² Volbach, *Elfenbeinarbeiten*, pp. 32–4, nos. 8–14; Olovsson, *The Consular Image*, pp. 38–44, no. 9.

⁵³ Cutler, 'The Making', p. 102. For more details on the imperial ambitions of Juliana and her husband and son, see Chapter 6.

⁵⁴ Eastmond, 'Consular Diptychs', pp. 743–6, figs 1, 3, and 4.

⁵⁵ Eastmond, 'Consular Diptychs', pp. 754–8.

⁵⁶ For further details, see Chapter 6.

⁵⁷ Eastmond, 'Consular Diptychs', p. 751.



Fig. 5.7. Diptych of Areobindus (Constantinople, 506). The State Hermitage Museum, St Petersburg, inv. no. W-12.



Fig. 5.8. Diptych of Areobindus (Constantinople, 506). Paris, Musée du Louvre, acc. no. 85–001669 EE. Photo (C) RMN-Grand Palais (musée du Louvre)/Daniel Arnaudet.

5.3. MONOGRAMS AS VISUAL SIGNS OF SOCIAL POWER, NOBLE IDENTITY, AND ELEVATED STATUS: RINGS, DRESS ACCESSORIES, AND LUXURY OBJECTS

The use of personal monograms on rings, the same practice that Quintus Aurelius Symmachus adapted for his signet-ring at the end of the fourth century, became quite popular among people of elevated status in the course of the fifth century. Although, as pointed out by Jeffrey Spier, relevant material is limited and poorly classified for the period spanning the late fourth to fifth centuries,⁵⁸ the usage of monograms on rings must have become widespread by the late fifth century since rings with personal monogrammatic signs have been found in hoards and graves dated to that period or slightly later, such as one of the princely graves in Apahida, Romania, or the Desana and Reggio Emilia hoards in northern Italy.

A richly furnished grave in Apahida (Apahida 1) preserves the remains of Omaharus, a local petty king with ostensible imperial contacts, as evidenced by his gold crossbow fibula and rings, thought to have been produced in imperial workshops and distributed as imperial gifts.⁵⁹ One of these rings, sent from Constantinople, is embellished with a box monogram of the king's name,⁶⁰ or perhaps of his wife *ΜΑΡΙΑΣ*.⁶¹ The tradition of such imperial gifts continued in the sixth and seventh centuries, and is revealed by the hoard at Malaja Pereshchepina in modern Ukraine, linked to the Bulgarian khan Kuvrat, who ruled in Magna Bulgaria in the 630–40s. The hoard includes gold rings produced at an imperial workshop in Constantinople, engraved with Greek monograms that have been deciphered as *ΧΟΒΡΑΤΟΥ* (Fig. 5.9a) and *ΧΟΒΡΑΤΟΥ ΠΑΤΡΙΚΙΟΥ* ('of Patrician Chobrat').⁶² These imperial gifts to the Turkic ruler were identical to the rings worn by contemporary high-ranking Byzantine officials, such as a gold ring from the Benaki Museum embellished with a cruciform monogram and the image of an imperial eagle beneath.⁶³

As in the aforementioned grave at Apahida, the Desana and Reggio Emilia hoards contain gold crossbow fibulas, indicating that they belonged to high-ranking people who were probably connected to the Ostrogothic court in Ravenna. The Reggio Emilia hoard was probably deposited early in the reign of King Theoderic

⁵⁸ Spier, 'Some Unconventional Early Byzantine Rings', pp. 13–15. See also Spier, *Late Antique and Early Christian Gems*, pp. 89–93.

⁵⁹ For more details on imperial control over gold dress accessories and jewellery reserved for the imperial family and high-ranking imperial dignitaries as well as the production of such luxury objects at imperial workshops in early Byzantine Constantinople, see Stolz, 'The Evidence'.

⁶⁰ Schmauder, *Oberschichtgräber*, vol. 1, pp. 52, 131–3, and vol. 2, fig. 2.4a, who dates the grave to the second half of the fifth century; Opreanu, 'The Beginnings', vol. 1, pp. 923–8; Opreanu, 'Latin or Greek?', pp. 279–82, who first dated that grave to the 460s and later re-dated it to the beginning of the sixth century.

⁶¹ Spier, 'Some Unconventional Early Byzantine Rings', p. 15, with an example of a late fifth-century Byzantine ring with a similar monogram (Plate 7).

⁶² Werner, *Der Grabfund*, p. 44; Spier, *Treasures*, p. 11.

⁶³ Athens, Benaki Museum, acc. no I'E 1829. On the so-called 'eagle' seals of early Byzantine officials with similar designs, see Metcalf, *Byzantine Seals*, pp. 101–11 and 302–37.



Fig. 5.9. Late antique rings with monograms: a) gold ring of Khan Kubrat from Malaja Pereshchepina, The State Hermitage Museum, St Petersburg, inv. no. W-1052; b) silver ring, Baltimore, WAM, acc. no. 57.2104.

and presents the riches of an Ostrogothic family, including two rings with box monograms, one of which has been decoded as *Marcus* or *Marcomirus* and the other as a name starting with AND[...].⁶⁴ The Desana hoard was deposited in Ostrogothic Italy slightly later, some time in the first half of the sixth century, and it preserves a ring with a box monogram that has been tentatively deciphered as *Macrobius*.⁶⁵ These examples demonstrate that, parallel to the use of monogrammatic stamps by high-ranking imperial officials from the late fifth century, the practice of engraving personal monograms on signet-rings became widespread among noble Romans and Germanic 'newcomers' with elevated status who were connected to the imperial court in Constantinople and the Ostrogothic court in Ravenna.⁶⁶ For this Germanic elite, the emulation of monogrammatic imperial culture began to play an important role in the visual projection of social power and status. This practice trickled down the social ladder, as testified by the great number of silver and copper-alloy rings present in many museum collections, with box and cruciform monograms in both Greek and Latin, generally dated to the fifth through to the seventh century (Fig. 5.9b).⁶⁷

Noble women must have worn some of these rings, and around the turn of the sixth century they and their noble spouses also began engraving personal monograms onto other forms of jewellery to project their elevated status. A pair of

⁶⁴ Bierbrauer, *Die ostgotischen Grab- und Schatzfunde*, pp. 198–204, figs xxxv.6–6a and 8–8a; Baldini Lipolis and Pinar Gil, 'Osservazioni', especially at p. 120. Cf. Opreanu, 'Latin or Greek?', pp. 279–80.

⁶⁵ Bierbrauer, *Die ostgotischen Grab- und Schatzfunde*, pp. 204–7, figs XII.1–1a; Aimone, *Il tesoro*, no. 29, pp. 100–1, 179–80, and 194–5.

⁶⁶ It goes without saying that many such 'newcomers' were well integrated into late Roman society through many years of military service and residence within the Roman *limites*. For more details and references on the Romanness of Ostrogothic Italy and the court of Theoderic the Great in Ravenna, see Chapter 7.

⁶⁷ See e.g. two early twentieth-century catalogues: Dalton, *Catalogue*; and Deloche, *Étude historique*. Unlike male jewellery and dress accessories, finger-rings and women's jewellery were exempt from imperial control in early Byzantium; see Stolz, 'The Evidence', p. 34, note 38.

identical gold bracelets produced in early Byzantium around 500 or in the early sixth century and currently held in museum collections in New York and Berlin highlights this new trend; a box monogram (probably *MAPIAΣ*, 'of Maria') placed within a scroll medallion (Fig. 5.10) marks each bracelet's round box intended for a relic.⁶⁸ The same trend is exemplified in the form of a sixth- or seventh-century gold earring, a seventh-century gold bracelet, a bracelet clasp, and a quatrefoil ornament—all with cruciform Greek monograms—from museum holdings in Athens.⁶⁹

In the same period, personal monograms were introduced onto belt buckles, a dress accessory that traditionally functioned as a late Roman and Byzantine symbol of power and authority and a material badge of imperial service for soldiers as well as civil servants.⁷⁰ This innovation was reminiscent of the usage of tamga-shaped signs on the second-century gold and bronze belt buckles and strap-ends from the Bosphorian kingdom in the northern Black Sea area. These tamgas have been interpreted as graphic signs of Bosphorian kings and their relatives, and the belts with such tamgas might have been distributed among royal warriors.⁷¹ Despite the apparent similarity between the two practices, the exact nature of cultural



Fig. 5.10. Early Byzantine gold bracelet (c.500). New York, MMA, acc. no. 17.190.2054.

⁶⁸ Staatliche Museen zu Berlin, ID no. 4926; Elbern, 'Das frühbyzantinische Monogramm-Armband'.

⁶⁹ On the first two, see Yeroulanou, *Diatrita*, nos. 235 and 554, pp. 65, 169, 194, and 290, figs 95 and 322. The bracelet has come from Kratigos/Mytilene Treasure on Lesbos, and has recently been transferred from the Benaki Museum to the Byzantine and Christiane Museum in Athens (exhibit no. BXM 00888). The other three objects remain in the Benaki Museum (the earring—no. ΓΕ 1809, the bracelet clasp—no. ΓΕ 1837, and the quatrefoil ornament—no. ΓΕ 1839). There is a similar early Byzantine quatrefoil silver ornament with cruciform Greek monograms on both sides in another museum collection (BrM, reg. no. 1982,0102.1).

⁷⁰ Schulze-Dörrlamm, *Byzantinische Gürtelschellen*, vol. 2, p. 286; Albrecht, 'Warum tragen wir einen Gürtel?'.

⁷¹ Treister, 'Bronzovye i zolotyie priazhki'.

transmission is rather hard to establish, especially since the rare usage of monograms in this medium was established much later, from the late fifth century through to the seventh. One of the earliest examples of such a belt buckle, dated to around 500 and probably originating from Italy, features a central medallion with a personal box monogram incised in niello (Fig. 5.11a), which encoded the name of the belt's wearer, a high-ranking military officer.⁷² This warrior could have been

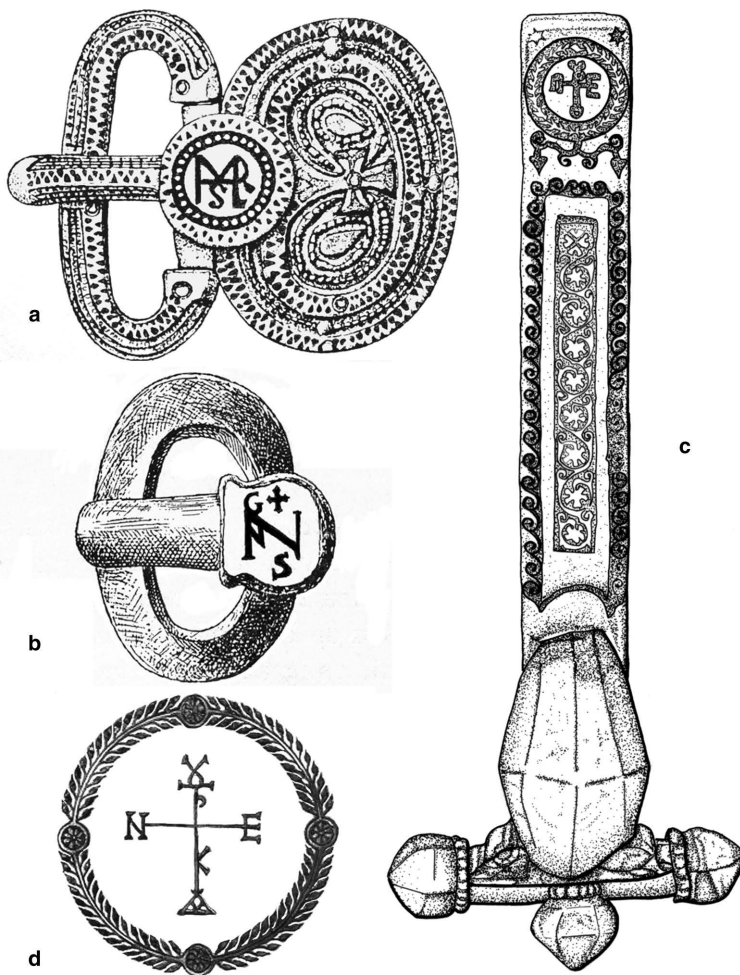


Fig. 5.11. Monograms on sixth-century objects, graphic drawings: a) from Italy (c.500); b) from the Moselle area; c) crossbow fibula from Yenikape, Istanbul. Drawing by Arwa Darwich-Eger; d) the central medallion of the silver plate of *kandidatos* Nektarios from Staatliche Museen zu Berlin, mid-sixth century.

⁷² Schulze-Dörrlamm, *Byzantinische Gürtelschellen*, vol. 1, pp. 65–7 (type B13), plate 4.3; and vol. 2, p. 323. The monogram has been decoded as presenting the name *Marius*, but its constituting letters M, H, R, S, and L or C do not support that interpretation.

connected to Odovacar's followers or the Ostrogothic military,⁷³ who were no different from late Roman and early Byzantine armies in their use of monogrammatic belt buckles or rings. As the finds of belt buckles with box monograms show,⁷⁴ after the demise of Western Roman emperorship, this material tradition survived in sixth-century Italy as well as to the north of the Alps in the Rhine-Moselle region. For example, bronze and gilded silver belt buckles have been discovered in the Rhine-Moselle area, in two separate sixth-century warrior graves—one with the monogram AGNUS (Fig. 5.11b) and the other with the monogrammatic name that has been deciphered as GUNDEBALDUS or DN HELEBADUS/HILDEBADUS.⁷⁵ In the first half of the sixth century, these territories were controlled by the kings of the Ostrogoths and Burgundians, and by the Merovingian king Theodebert I (533–48), all of whom proudly displayed their Latin box monograms on their royal coins.⁷⁶

From the mid-sixth to seventh centuries, this practice reached its zenith in the core Byzantine areas in the Eastern Mediterranean, as well as in reconquered territories in Sicily, North Africa, and southern Spain, as evinced by finds of belt buckles with cruciform monograms in these regions.⁷⁷ A mould for a belt plate with a Greek cruciform monogram has even been found at Classe, the port of Ravenna.⁷⁸ Furthermore, gold belt buckles bearing the cruciform personal monograms of their wearers began to be produced at imperial workshops in this period, most likely for distribution among higher imperial officials (Fig. 5.12).⁷⁹ As with late antique rings, these precious symbols of status and social power were supplemented by cheaper copper-alloy buckles embellished with monograms, which were distributed among lower social strata.⁸⁰ One particular group of such belt buckles features the cruciform monograms of Emperor Heraclius (610–41), and could have been produced as donatives given to his soldiers.⁸¹ This monogrammatic practice was also adaptive to changes in fashion, as shown by the appearance of monograms on the strap ends of belts from the late sixth century until the end of the seventh.⁸²

Along with gold belt buckles displaying personal monograms, imperial workshops at Constantinople began issuing gold crossbow fibulas (another male dress accessory expressing a social rank) with cruciform personal monograms of their recipients. One of them has been unearthed during recent excavations in Yenikapi

⁷³ On the interplay of a military status and 'ethnic' identity among Ostrogoths in Italy, see Halsall, 'The Ostrogothic Military'.

⁷⁴ Schulze-Dörlamm, *Byzantinische Gürtelschellen*, vol. 2, fig. 128.

⁷⁵ Deloche, *Étude historique*, pp. 366–8, no. VI; Schulze-Dörlamm, *Byzantinische Gürtelschellen*, vol. 2, p. 323; Seibt and Koch, 'Eine Schilddornschnalle', pp. 341–3.

⁷⁶ For more details, see Chapter 7.

⁷⁷ Schulze-Dörlamm, *Byzantinische Gürtelschellen*, vol. 2, fig. 128.

⁷⁸ Christie, 'Byzantines', p. 116, plate 4.

⁷⁹ For examples of such belt buckles and relevant references, see Ross, *Catalogue*, vol. 2, pp. 4 and 8–9, nos. 2 and 5; Entwistle, 'Notes', p. 20, no. 1.

⁸⁰ See, for examples, Schulze-Dörlamm, *Byzantinische Gürtelschellen*, vol. 1, pp. 184–6 (type D15, dated to the seventh century); Entwistle, 'Notes', no. 11 (dated to c.600–50).

⁸¹ Schulze-Dörlamm, *Byzantinische Gürtelschellen*, vol. 1, p. 186, nos. 163–4.

⁸² Tobias, 'Riemenzungen'.



Fig. 5.12. Early Byzantine belt buckle, found in Hamas, Syria. Baltimore, WAM, acc. no. 57.545.

(Istanbul), and has been dated to the second quarter or the middle of the sixth century (Fig. 5.11c).⁸³ Imperial workshops placed monograms not only on such luxury objects as rings, belt buckles, strap ends, and crossbow brooches, but also on another media intimately connected to the imperial sphere: silks. Anna Muthesius has recently pointed to seventh- and eighth-century silks with cruciform monograms, including those bearing the monogrammatic device of Emperor Heraclius, and she has argued that such ‘administrative silks’ were distributed among various imperial officials, and that the imperial monograms woven onto them functioned as graphic confirmations of imperial power and authority delegated to their recipients.⁸⁴

The personal monograms of late Roman and early Byzantine nobles appeared not only on dress accessories, jewellery, and other material objects that traditionally functioned as social extensions of the human body, but also on luxury objects such as domestic silver tableware, which articulated the noble identity of their owners in the context of dining as a social display of status. As early as the mid-sixth century, Byzantine silver plates began to feature the cruciform monograms of their owners as one of their principal decorative elements. This practice was probably inspired not only by the popularity of monograms on other media but also by earlier Roman tradition. In this regard, it is hardly accidental that on the earliest Byzantine sample the central monogrammatic device—decoded as *NEKTAPIOΣ KANAIATOS* and thus identifying the owner as a palace guard—is framed by a laurel wreath similar to that encircling the monograms of Pelegrina Turcia on the late fourth-century silver plates from the Esquiline Treasure (Fig. 5.11d).⁸⁵ Nectarios’ graphic sign is different from Pellegrina’s in employing a court title instead of a late Roman aristocratic *nomen*, which is symptomatic of both the changed sources of social power in early Byzantium and of its connection not so

⁸³ Eger, ‘Between Amuletic Ornament’, p. 313; Kızıltan and Baran Çelik, eds, *Stories*, p. 127, no. 72.

⁸⁴ Muthesius, ‘Memory and Meaning’, pp. 354–61.

⁸⁵ Staatliche Museen zu Berlin, ID no. 4925. For a general overview of such early Byzantine plates, see Leader-Newby, *Silver and Society*, pp. 177–80. See also ICA, no. 179539.

much to an aristocratic pedigree as to imperial service. The practice of embellishing the middle part of silver dishes with their owners' monogrammatic signs continued in the first half of the seventh century, as evinced by a plate from Nicosia with the cruciform niello monogram *IQANNOY* ('of John'), and by three plates from one dining set—with the monogram *ΘEOΔΩΡΟΥ Α* ('of Theodore *A[ual]*...') framed by an ivy wreath—that have been found on Cyprus and divided between museums in New York, Baltimore, and Washington, DC (Fig. 5.13).⁸⁶

Surviving late antique silver cochlearia provide more data for the new monogrammatic trend in domestic tableware, since spoons of that type began to be



Fig. 5.13. Early Byzantine silver plate (610–13). New York, MMA, acc. no. 52.25.2.

⁸⁶ Dodd, *Byzantine Silver Stamps*, no. 33 (Nicosia, the Museum of Antiquities: 602–10), and nos. 37–9 (MMA, The Walters Art Gallery, and the Dumbarton Oaks Collection: 610–13); Ross, *Catalogue*, vol. 1, no. 17, pp. 21–3; Mundell Mango, *Silver*, nos. 103–5.

employed for general-purpose eating in the late Roman empire.⁸⁷ The cochlearia of the sixth and seventh centuries frequently featured the personal monograms of their owners on the discs connecting the spoons' bowls with their handles. Connecting discs were a fifth-century invention, and created an ideal medallion-shaped surface on which graphic signs such as monograms, christograms, and the sign of the cross could be inscribed. One may wonder to what extent the growing popularity of such graphic signs in late antiquity contributed to this distinctive material development.

As shown by Stefan Hauser in his study of cochlearia discovered before 1992, 49 per cent of specimens (forty-one spoons) found in the Latin West (totalling eighty-four spoons) bear Christian symbols on their discs, while 21 per cent (eighteen spoons) are embellished with Latin box monograms (Fig. 5.14). The percentage of monogrammed silver spoons grew even higher in early Byzantium. Out of 113 surviving cochlearia, 37 per cent (forty-one spoons) feature discs engraved with Greek box or cruciform monograms. The vast majority of monograms (fifty out of fifty-nine) appear on the spoons' left sides, with the intended effect that the monogram would face an average right-handed person holding the utensil.⁸⁸ On the remaining nine spoons from the Desana hoard, produced in the early decades of the sixth century, the left side was originally engraved with a monogrammatic cross, and a somewhat crudely designed owner's monogram, possibly of the Ostrogoth *Gundila*, was added on the right side, probably at a later stage.⁸⁹ The left side of a spoon's disc was thus chosen as the place of an owner's monogram in order to project their elevated status and cultural capital to guests during social dining.

5.4. MONOGRAMS AS A SYMPTOMATIC FEATURE OF LATE ANTIQUE *PAIDEIA*

Personal monograms placed within a laurel or ivy wreath, or another circular frame, were thus inscribed on silverware, jewellery, dress accessories, and other luxury objects to function as graphic signs of the owners' social identity. In that sense, they functioned in a similar manner to the later aristocratic coats of arms, and Hans Belting's comments on the status of late medieval coats of arms and portraits as media of the body are highly relevant. In his words, the coat of arms was a sign defining the body of a social estate; it was 'an abstraction of a body'.⁹⁰ In a similar vein, late antique personal monograms on objects of social prestige functioned as

⁸⁷ Swift, 'Design', p. 232.

⁸⁸ Hauser, *Spätantike und frühbyzantinische Silberlöffel*, pp. 63–8. On the matter of right- and left-handed usage of late Roman spoons, see Swift, 'Design', pp. 233–4. New silver spoons with monograms have appeared in museum collections since 1992, such as the spoon with a Greek box monogram that the Hermitage acquired in 2002 (inv. no. W-1497), which can be deciphered as *ΑΝΑΣΤΑΣΙΟΥ* or *ΙΟΥΣΤΙΝΙΑΝΟΥ*.

⁸⁹ Hauser, *Spätantike und frühbyzantinische Silberlöffel*, nos. 28–37, plate 5; Aimone, *Il tesoro*, nos. 34–42, pp. 106–8, and figs XVI.2, 4, 6, and XVII.5.

⁹⁰ Belting, 'The Coat of Arms'.

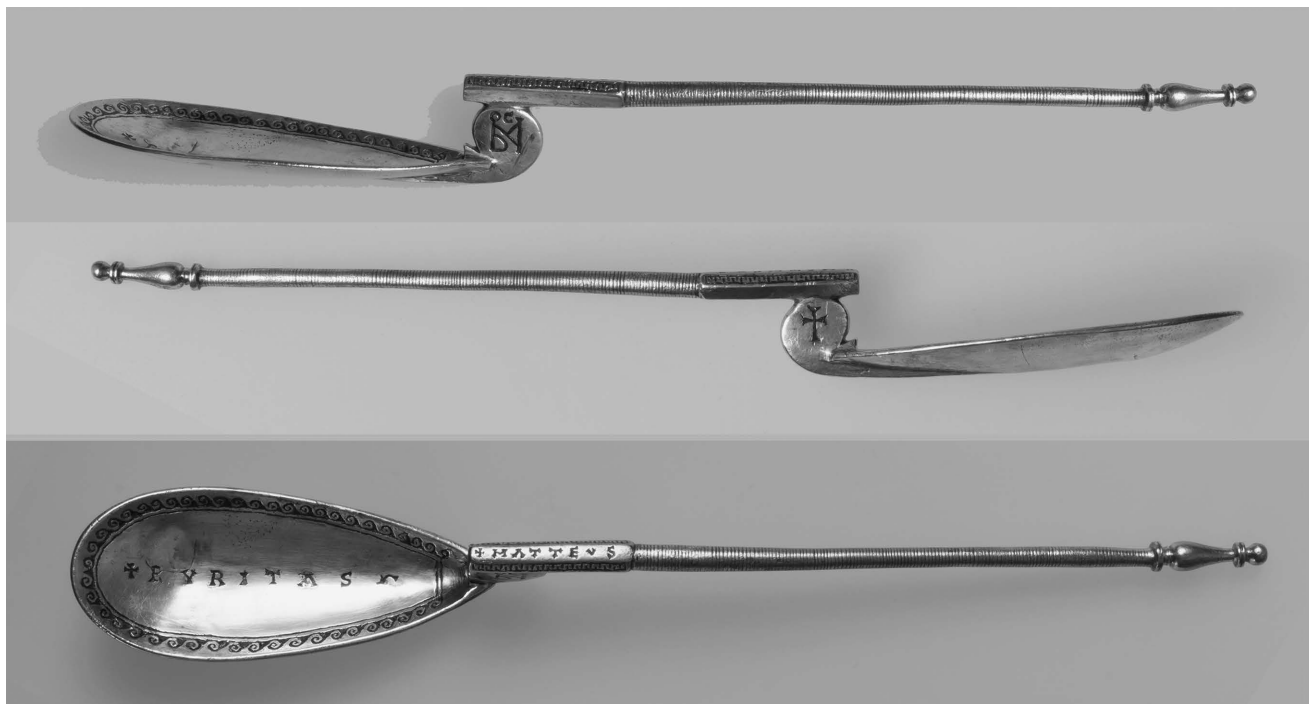


Fig. 5.14. Late antique silver spoon. New York, MMA, acc. no. 2005.39.

'body signs' referring to a specific social estate; in this case the late Roman and early Byzantine aristocracy. For this reason, early monograms could include an aristocratic *nomen*, and later ones a title referring to a noble status or imperial service. During the reign of Justinian I, known for the anti-pagan purges of 529 and 545–6,⁹¹ early Byzantine graphic abstractions of a body began imitating the salvific graphic image of God as Logos, namely the sign of the cross, and thus manifested to the viewers the Christian credentials of people represented by such monograms. By the seventh century, this graphic sign became the default monogrammatic structure for Byzantine Christian well-to-doers. The silver spoons from the Lampsakos Treasure demonstrate that transition in an unambiguous way.

These spoons are marked with two different personal monograms: a cruciform monogram *TIMOΘEOY* ('of Timothy') and a complicated box monogram, featuring a cross in the upper field and set within a traditional late Roman wreath.⁹² The spoons thus comprise examples from two different sets, each probably originally consisting of twelve spoons. The two sets differ not only in the distinct owner's monograms on their discs, but also in the nature of their inscriptions. Eight spoons from the set marked with the box monogram have been studied in museum collections in London, Paris, and Smyrna and attributed to the sixth century. All are inscribed on their bowls and on the top of their handles, with five including a line from the anonymous Greek *Epigram on the Seven Sages*, well known in late antiquity and Byzantium and preserved in the *Palatine Anthology* (Fig. 5.15).⁹³ In this epigram, popular Greek maxims were attributed to each sage (Cleobulos, Chilon, Periander, Pittacus, Solon, Bias, and Thales), who are identified with reference to their hometowns. The remaining three spoons present to their viewer Latin poetic lines. The spoon set thus operates as a material medium of late antique *paideia*.

Yet the spoons' quantity and employment in dining settings implies their use by a small circle of their owner's acquaintances in an environment where a jocular tone was most welcome. Accordingly, on the left side of each handle facing a spoon's holder, and to the right of the owner's monogram on its disc, short Greek phrases (unknown from other sources and containing occasional misspellings) provide an elaboration or entertaining twist to a spoon's main literary message. These phrases were most likely created just for these spoons, and, following the owner's monogram, they serve as his personal comments or jokes, demonstrating his wit to friends and relatives. On the spoons with the lines of the seven sages, for example, Bias of Priene's maxim 'Most men are evil' receives the jocular elaboration 'Those

⁹¹ Kaldellis, 'The Making of Hagia Sophia', pp. 350–2.

⁹² Hauser, *Spätantike und frühbyzantinische Silberlöffel*, nos. 103–10 (box monogram) and 160–1 and 196–201 (cruciform monogram). He follows Fink in deciphering the first monogrammatic sign as *ANΔPEOY EΠΙΣΚΟΠΟΥ*, but this interpretation remains dubious since the monogram lacks a letter pi.

⁹³ *Greek Anthology*, vol. 3, pp. 198–201. The lines referring to Cleobulus of Lindus and Thales of Miletus are absent on surviving spoons. For further details on this set of spoons and its inscriptions, see Hauser, *Spätantike und frühbyzantinische Silberlöffel*, pp. 69–74; Baratte, 'Vaisselle'; Buckton, ed., *Byzantium*, no. 133, pp. 118–20.



Fig. 5.15. Silver spoons from the Lampsakus Treasure, view from above. London, BrM © The Trustees of the British Museum.

who detest pleasure',⁹⁴ whereas Periander of Corinth's maxim 'Restrain anger' is trivialized with the humorous comment 'When your mistress hates you'.⁹⁵ The same playful epigrammatic exchange continues on the spoons with Latin verses (Fig. 5.15), with the owner's humorous responses given in Greek: Vergil's 'O handsome youth, do not believe too much in beauty' (*Eclogues*, 2. 7) is countered with 'You cannot be beautiful without money',⁹⁶ while 'Love conquers all, and we yield to love' (Vergil, *Eclogues*, 10.69) meets the response 'Eat, you who are lovesick'.⁹⁷ An anonymous Roman epigraph, 'Baths, wine and love make death come faster', receives the owner's witty warning 'Amidst incenses, watch your hernia'.⁹⁸

Whereas the spoon set featuring the box monogram is representative of the classical tradition of late antique *paideia*, the set marked with the cruciform monogram and produced slightly later—between the mid-sixth and mid-seventh centuries—leans towards new Christian erudition. The latter set is stripped of any classical reference, and six out of the eight surviving spoons are inscribed with the names of evangelists and apostles on the top of their handles: Matthew, Mark, Luke, Jacob, Peter, and Simon. François Baratte has suggested a possible liturgical function for these spoons, but this need not be the case.⁹⁹ Any educated Christian was expected to know the names of the evangelists and apostles, and such inscriptions were probably deemed more appropriate for pious Christian owners or for donors to ecclesiastical foundations, as were cruciform shapes. An early seventh-century silver spoon from the Kaper Koraon Treasure in Syria, currently in The Walters Art Gallery (Fig. 5.16), illustrates the latter point by showing the image of

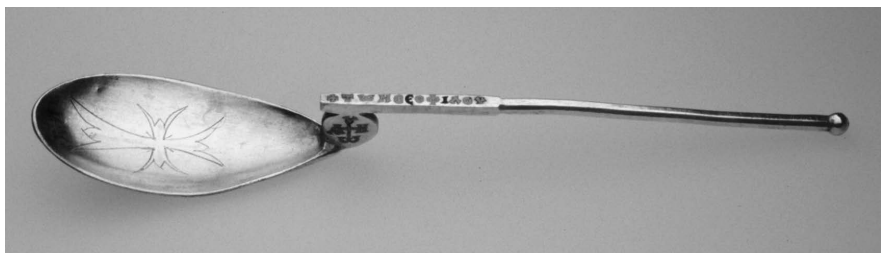


Fig. 5.16. Silver spoon from the Kaper Koraon Treasure, Baltimore, WAM, acc. no. 57.649.

⁹⁴ London, BrM, reg. no. 1848,0601.12: top—'ΤΟΥΣ ΠΛΕΟΝΑΣ ΚΑΚΙΟΥΣ ΔΕ ΒΙΑΣ ΑΠΕΦΗΝΕ ΠΙΡΙΗΝΕΥΣ'; left side—'ΤΟΥΣ ΜΙΧΛΟΝΟΥΣ'. English translations on the spoon from the British Museum and Louvre are from *Byzantium*, ed. by Buckton, pp. 118 and 120.

⁹⁵ Paris, Musée du Louvre, Bj 2049: top—'ΟΣ ΔΕ ΚΟΡΙΝΘΩΝ ΕΒΑΙΕ ΘΥΜΟΥ ΚΡΑΤΕ ΕΙΝ ΠΕΡΙΛΑΝΔΡΟΣ', left side—'ΟΤΑΝ ΜΙΣΙ ΣΕ Η ΦΙΛΗ ΣΟΥ'.

⁹⁶ London, BrM, reg. nos. 1848,0601.11: top—'O FORMOSE PUER NIMIUM NE CREDE COLORI', left side—'ΑΚΕΡΜΙΣ ΟΥΚ ΕΙ ΕΥΜΟΡΦΟΣ'.

⁹⁷ London, BrM, reg. nos. 1886,0709.1: top—'OMNIA VINCIT AMOR ET NOS CEDAMUS AMORI', left side—'ΤΡΩΓΕ ΕΠΟΤΟΚΡΟΥΣΤΕ'.

⁹⁸ Originally in Smyrna, now lost, Hauser, *Spätantike und frühbyzantinische Silberlöffel*, p. 73: top—'BALNEA VINA VENUS FACIUNT PROPERANTIA FATA'; left side—'ΘΥΩΝ ΘΗΡ[Η]Ι ΤΗΝ ΚΗΛΗΝ ΣΟΥ'.

⁹⁹ Baratte, 'Vaisselle', p. 5; Hauser, *Spätantike und frühbyzantinische Silberlöffel*, pp. 78–87, argues against a liturgical function for the late antique cochlearia.

the cross on its bowl and the cruciform monograms of donors ('of John' and 'of Thomas') on the two sides of the disc, with the name of their father spelled out on the handle ('[sons] of Theophilus').¹⁰⁰

Yet personal monograms were viewed as appropriate regardless of the classical or Christian leanings of the spoons' owners, because such graphic devices projected, first and foremost, their noble status and familiarity with elevated late antique and early Christian culture. This monogrammatic trend was also a part of a more general awareness in the visuality of letters that gradually permeated late antique culture and was mirrored in concurrent written discourses, for instance, in the grammatical treatises. In the mid-fourth century, the famous grammarian Aelius Donatus encapsulated a classical Roman attitude in his definition of a letter as 'the smallest part of articulated speech'.¹⁰¹ In an early sixth-century *Institutiones grammaticae*, another author highly popular in the early Middle Ages, Priscian, accentuated instead the difference between letters (*litterae*) as visual characters (*nota*) and 'elements' (*elementi*) as their oral pronunciations (*pronuntiationes*).¹⁰² Priscian did so with reference to the fourth-century grammatical work of Diomedes, but his choice must also have been influenced by the ubiquitous presence of visual letterforms on material objects and monuments in his immediate social surroundings in Constantinople, where he taught Latin grammar between 512 and 526.¹⁰³ The concurrent proliferation of monograms contributed to such awareness of the profound distinction between the various visual forms that letters took across a diverse range of media, and their related oral utterances.

To conclude, having originated as an ennobling feature of fourth- and fifth-century calligraphic culture, by the sixth and seventh centuries monograms had developed into an immanent part of a new visual Christian *paideia*, affecting private headquarters as well as public spaces. Taking a broader perspective, the spoons with monograms—alongside the monogrammatic coins of Theodosius II and his imperial successors, the other luxury objects of gold and silver bearing owners' monograms and/or monogrammatic stamps of emperors and high-ranking imperial officials, and the ivory diptychs with consular monograms—exemplified a fifth- and sixth-century trend, one which employed monogrammatic devices as the third mode of visual representation distinct from literary inscriptions/legends and figural imagery. In the sixth century this representative mode, which had originated in late antique calligraphic culture and rapidly spread across various media, not only affected luxury and mass-produced objects but also influenced ecclesiastical spaces.

¹⁰⁰ Mundell Mango, *Silver*, no. 19, pp. 121–2; Hauser, *Spätantike und frühbyzantinische Silberlöffel*, no. 149.

¹⁰¹ Donatus, *Ars maior*, ed. Holtz, p. 603: 'Littera est pars minima vocis articulatae'.

¹⁰² Priscianus, *Institutionum grammaticarum libri XVIII*, ed. Hertz, vol. 1, pp. 6–7: 'Hoc ergo interest inter elementa et literas, quod elementa proprie dicuntur ipsae pronuntiationes, notae autem earum literae.'

¹⁰³ On Priscian's text and the relevant passage, see Irvine, *The Making*, pp. 61–2, 93–4, and 97–101.

6

Public Monuments and the Monogrammatic Display of Authority in the Post-Roman World

6.1. FROM CONSULAR DIPTYCHS TO THE MONUMENTAL DISPLAY OF AUTHORITY: JULIANA ANIANA AND ST POLYEUKTOS (c.506–27)

The first notable example of monograms incorporated into a monumental display of authority relates to the construction of the new church of St Polyeuktos in Constantinople (completed by c.527–8).¹ St Polyeuktos was built by a mighty woman of imperial descent, Anicia Juliana (c.463–527/8) (Chart 6.1). Her father, Flavius Anicius Olybrius, was western emperor in 472, while her mother Placidia was a daughter of Emperor Valentinian III. Juliana married Areobindus, whose consulship in 506 was commemorated by the set of diptychs discussed in the previous chapter, and bore a son, Flavius Anicius Olybrius Junior, who became consul in the East at a very young age in 491.² Her family could thus claim imperial pedigree; its male members were elevated to consulship, the highest Roman civil office that late Roman and early Byzantine emperors regularly held; and her son was named after his imperial grandfather. The imperial aspirations in Juliana's family must therefore have been profound in the late fifth and early sixth centuries. Juliana and her family were known to be firm supporters of Chalcedonian Orthodoxy, and during a popular revolt in 512 against the monophysite policies of Anastasius I, a rioting crowd approached Juliana's palace shouting 'Areobindus for emperor'. Areobindus himself had already fled Constantinople to avoid any involvement in that riot, and died not long thereafter. After the demise of her husband, Anicia Juliana seems to have decided to promote her son Anicius Olybrius Junior's cause in the race for emperorship, who could boast of kinship with the fifth-century emperors through his maternal lineage and could also claim proximity to the ruling emperor through his marriage to Anastasius I's niece, Irene. After all, in the early sixth century an oracle had predicted the rule of a certain 'Olybrius'.³

¹ Based on textual evidence, Mango and Ševčenko, 'Remains', date the construction of the church to c.524–7. But the brickstamp evidence suggests that the construction of the church took place in two stages starting after c.508/9 and ending before 528: Bardill, *Brickstamps*, vol. 1, pp. 62–4 and 111–16.

² Jones, Martindale, and Morris, *The Prosopography*, vol. 2, pp. 143–4, 635–6, and 795–8.

³ *The Oracle of Baalbek*, ed. Alexander, p. 126, note 15.

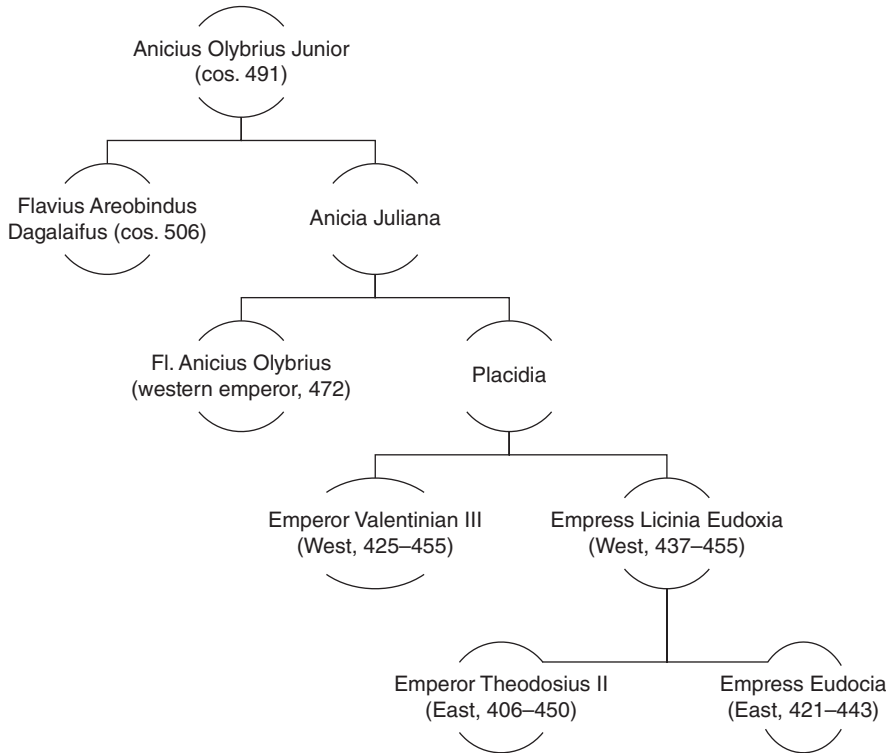


Chart 6.1. The imperial ancestry of Anicius Olybrius Junior.

Yet this matrimonial move did not help Anicius Olybrius after Anastasius' demise, and he was sidelined by a shrewd Thracian commander of the palace guards, Justin I, who beat the scramble and rose to imperial power in 518.⁴ In the 520s, Justin's younger nephew Justinian rose to prominence in Constantinople. His ascendancy further jeopardized the chances that Anicius Olybrius Junior would receive imperial nomination. These chances faded further still when Justinian I was proclaimed caesar, probably in 525, and then became sole emperor after the death of Justin I in 527. Five years later, Anicius somehow became involved in the Nika revolt against Justinian and was exiled after its bloody suppression. Although at a later stage he was permitted to return and even had his confiscated property restored to him, this reconciliation did not halt his political downfall, and Juliana's family vanished from the written record after these events.⁵

In this historical context, the gradual construction of the church in two stages can hardly have been accidental. The first phase of the building process started a few years after the consulship of Areobindus and was halted by the events of 512. Around that time, the people of the city of Honoratae presented Juliana with a luxurious manuscript, the so-called Vienna Dioscorides, as a reciprocal gift for the

⁴ Croke, 'Justinian under Justin', pp. 16–19; Bjornlie, *Politics*, pp. 60–2.

⁵ Harrison, *Excavations*, vol. 1, pp. 4–5 and 419; Harrison, *A Temple*, p. 36.

church she had built in their town. The manuscript is notable for its ambiguous dedication miniature that shows Juliana as a figure with various imperial attributes,⁶ suggesting that in the 510s and 520s many in Constantinople and its surrounding areas perceived Juliana and her male family members to be worthy of the imperial throne. The second major phase in the construction of the church, when its superstructures were erected, was carried out between c.517 and 521 when the elderly Justin I became emperor rather unexpectedly, and the matter of the following imperial succession remained undecided and contested.⁷ Public display played an important role in that contest, and the future emperor Justinian is said to have surpassed the spending of all other consuls for his first consular games in 521.⁸ The new church of St Polyeuktos was completed soon after Justinian's consulship, and presented another monumental form of public display. Built near Anicia Juliana's palace, the church communicated to the people of Constantinople the hereditary authority and exceptional position of her family in the imperial capital, the attributes that Justinian clearly lacked. The splendid building replaced an earlier and smaller church dedicated to the same saint, which had been founded by Juliana's great grandmother, Eudocia. It is important to remember that in early Byzantium the foundation or refoundation of a church was a public act that enhanced one's reputation and authority, and for noble women, such activity represented the principal legitimate means to demonstrate status and social power. Furthermore, refounding a church allowed the person responsible to be compared to its original founder, usually favourably—in the case of St Polyeuktos and Anicia Juliana, the latter surpassed the deeds of none other than Empress Eudocia, the pious wife of Theodosius II.⁹

In its contemporary context, the refounding of St Polyeuktos could have been seen as a public act designed to express the imperial claims of Juliana's family, and, once completed, the church might have appeared to its contemporaries 'as a challenge to the authority of Justin and his nephew Justinian'.¹⁰ The text of a Greek epigram placed inside the church to praise its founder made these imperial allusions clear, emphasizing that Anicia Juliana had built a church finer and larger than her imperial ancestress and was thus worthy of her imperial descent. Such allusions might have been interpreted by her contemporaries as a stark contrast to the markedly humble origins of both Justin I and the up-and-coming Justinian I. Furthermore, the epigram expresses the hope that, by the construction of this and other churches, Juliana and her 'immortal family'—including her only son and his daughters—would receive protection from her holy intercessors. Finally, the text likens her ostentatious building to the Temple of Solomon,¹¹ built by a traditional

⁶ Kiilerich, 'The Image', with important corrections in Croke, 'Justinian, Theodora', p. 56, note 158; and Nathan, 'The *Vienna Dioscorides' dedicatio*', pp. 95–102.

⁷ Bardill, *Brickstamps*, vol. 1, pp. 62–4 and 111–16.

⁸ *The Chronicle of Marcellinus*, ed. Croke, p. 41; Croke, 'Justinian under Justin', p. 37; Antony Eastmond, 'Consular Diptychs', p. 762.

⁹ James, 'Making the Name', esp. pp. 63–5.

¹⁰ Harrison, *Excavations*, vol. 1, p. 420.

¹¹ Harrison, *A Temple*, p. 139; Harrison, *Excavations*, vol. 1, pp. 5–7. On the architectural similarities with the Solomonic Temple, see Bardill, 'A New Temple'.

figure of reference for the early Byzantine emperors. The new church was certainly worthy of such a comparison: at the time of its construction it was the largest church in Constantinople, embellished with gilded ceilings and piers and columns made of local Proconnesian marble. Its inner parts were decorated with carvings made by the best sculptors available in Constantinople, and were consequently superior to those of any earlier church built in Constantinople. Its inner decorations were further distinguished by their departure from traditional Graeco-Roman forms, and were instead influenced by Sasanian architectural ornament.¹² This artistic choice may have been intentional, conveying both Juliana's familiarity with the Sasanian visual culture of royalty and her claim to sovereignty in a truly cosmopolitan sense.¹³

Box monograms of Greek letters were carved on some piers and capitals, and on the cornices placed above the doorways leading from the narthex to the nave. The monograms on the fragments of cornices found during excavations are all of different kinds and cannot be interpreted as hiding the name of the church's founder or that of her son;¹⁴ they could instead have encoded an invocative textual message addressed to the building's visitors. The piers of the church, two of which were reused as *spolia* in thirteenth-century Venice (the so-called *pilastrì acritani* outside San Marco), were unique for their carved ornaments (Fig. 6.1). Box monograms framed by medallions occupied central locations within the piers' ornamental designs, with two monograms on two opposite sides. Unfortunately, these graphic devices survive only on one side of each pier in Venice, but it is clear that the upper monograms encoded the name of St Polyuktos in the genitive, Ἀγίου Πολυεύκτου (Fig. 6.2a–b).¹⁵ The meaning of a monogram preserved on the lower part of one of the piers remains unclear (Fig. 6.2c). Thus, no surviving monogram from St Polyuktos can confidently be deciphered as the name of either Anicia Juliana or her son (Fig. 6.2d).¹⁶ Yet the meaning of these graphic devices is not just unclear to modern audiences but was also obscure to Justin I and Justinian I, who lacked formal literary education and were viewed as cultural outsiders by the imperial aristocracy of Constantinople.¹⁷ As mentioned in the preceding chapter, creating and reading monograms became an immanent part of late antique *paideia*, and the great grandfather of Anicia Juliana, Theodosius II, even received an epithet celebrating his calligraphic skills. The use of various monograms as decorative messages in the inner parts of the church thus aimed to show through the medium

¹² Harrison, *Excavations*, vol. 1, p. 414; Harrison, *A Temple*, p. 80; and Strube, *Polyeuktoskirche*, pp. 61–80.

¹³ Canepa, *The Two Eyes*, pp. 210–16.

¹⁴ Mango and Ševčenko, 'Remains', p. 240; Harrison, *A Temple*, pp. 90, 121, nos. 2a–b, figs 111–20; Deichmann, ed., *Corpus*, pp. 138–41, nos. 639–40; Eastmond, 'Monograms', pp. 219–20 and 226–7.

¹⁵ Harrison, *Excavations*, vol. 1, p. 130, nos. 6a i–ii, figs 143, 144, and 154. See also a fragment of a pier with the monogram of St Polyuktos within a box frame, Harrison, *Excavations*, vol. 1, p. 162, no. 21, fig. 236.

¹⁶ A reused capital in the Papadopoli Gardens in Venice, identified as originally belonging to this church, has a badly preserved box monogram, which is also difficult to decipher: Vickers, 'A "New" Capital'.

¹⁷ Bell, *Social Conflict*, p. 276.



Fig. 6.1. *Pilastrini acritani* outside San Marco, Venice.

of ennobling calligraphic art that, unlike the Thracian newcomers,¹⁸ Juliana and her family were equal to Theodosius. As such, the monumental monograms in St Polyeuktos functioned as signs of authority that evoked the lineage and impeccable cultural background of Juliana and her family.

The church of St Polyeuktos preserves the earliest known use of monumental monograms in such numbers, and they appeared on various types of carved decorations within the building. Yet it is probable that such a practice started on a more modest scale around the turn of the sixth century.¹⁹ A single capital of unknown provenance found in Rome features a box monogram placed within a laurel wreath. The monogram has been deciphered as the name of the Roman urban prefect in 509–10, Artemidorus (Fig. 6.3a); however, this attribution remains highly hypothetical.²⁰ Capitals in Ravenna with monograms of the Ostrogothic king Theoderic the Great (493–526) provide a more secure early case of monumental monograms (Fig. 6.3b), contemporary with the construction of St Polyeuktos and perhaps even slightly earlier.²¹ These capitals currently surmount columns in the portico

¹⁸ On the rather deficient educational backgrounds of Justin I and Justinian I, see Croke, 'Justinian under Justin', pp. 19–22.

¹⁹ Joachim Kramer suggests that the use of monumental monograms as signs of ruling sovereigns started at the end of the fifth century: 'Kämpferkapitelle', p. 189.

²⁰ Dresken-Weiland, 'Ein Kämpfer-Kapitell'.

²¹ For stylistic reasons, these capitals have been dated to the first half of the sixth century, Sodini, Barsanti, and Guidobaldi, 'La sculpture', p. 323.

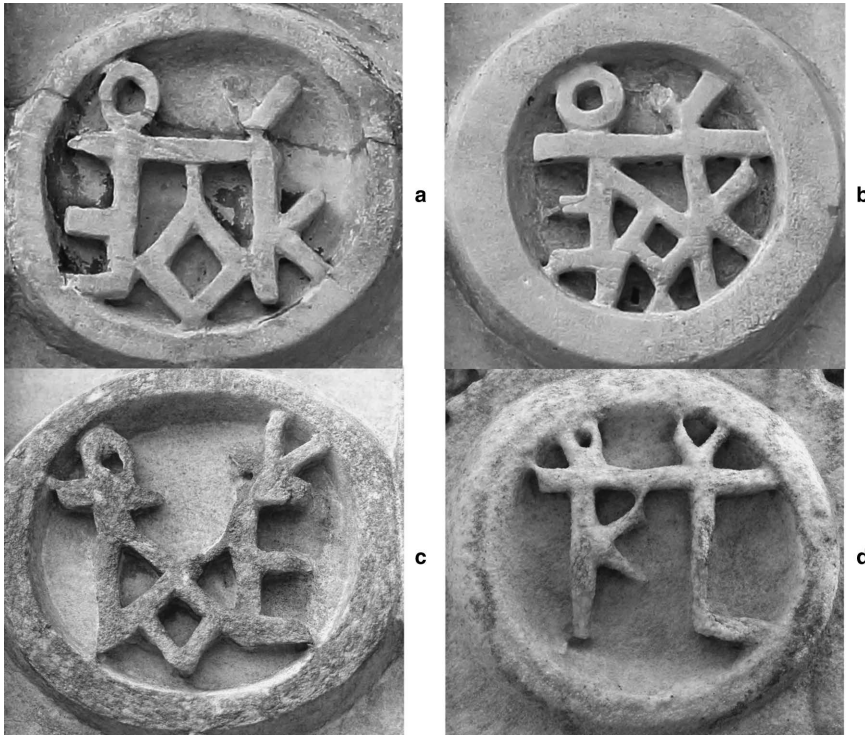


Fig. 6.2. a–b) Ἀγίου Πολυεύκτου monograms on the *pilastri acritani*; c) undeciphered monogram on the *pilastri acritani*; d) monogram on a capital from St Polyeuktos, reused in the Papadopoli Gardens in Venice.



Fig. 6.3. Monumental monograms from: a) Rome; b) Ravenna; c) Aphrodisias.

of the Venetian Palace, at the Piazza del Popolo. Originally, they were carved either for the public building known as *basilica Herculis* or, more likely, for the so-called *ecclesia Gothorum* built by Theoderic during his rule over Italy.²² Theoderic's monumental monograms are identical to those used on his silver

²² Cirelli, *Ravenna*, pp. 98, 236, and 248.

coins, and were no doubt deployed to display his authority in the public spaces of the Ostrogothic capital.

Such usage of monumental monograms represented a natural development from the earlier Roman tradition of naming a sponsor on public monuments, and on columns in particular. For example, Ammianus mocked C. Ceionius Rufius Volusianus (also called Lampadius), the urban prefect of Rome in 364, for his habit of inscribing his own name onto ancient monuments as their founder when he had simply restored them (*Res gestae*, xxvii. 3.7). Indeed, columns with Volusianus' name carved on them (as VOLVSIANIVC) have been found in Ostia, near Rome, in the portico around the temple of the Fabri Navales. At the time of the portico's construction, a patron's name might typically be placed on the lower part of a column.²³ But by the early sixth century, the upper part of a column, and more precisely its capital, became an honoured place for such an inscription. The Church of San Clemente in Rome preserves an example of this practice on one of the pillars that the presbyter Mercurius, later Pope John II (533–5), donated to his church, where they probably supported a baldachin over the altar.²⁴

The appearance of monumental monograms may also have been influenced by an earlier tradition in which stonemasons carved marks onto various marble pillars, piers, bases, and capitals produced in Proconnesus near Constantinople from the late fourth century onwards. These resembled control marks used in Hellenistic coinage and displayed just a few letters, sometimes conjoined in simple box monograms, which are thought to have represented the abbreviated names of their producers.²⁵ In contrast, monumental monograms might have developed as a means to honour donors or commissioners within specific ritual settings.

The city of Aphrodisias in Asia Minor reveals the use of personal monograms in public buildings in a manner reminiscent of the above-mentioned Italian cases. Charlotte Roueché has assigned the production of these monograms to a wide period spanning the fifth and sixth centuries and perhaps stretching even later; however the box monograms on column capitals there were probably carved in the late fifth century or the first half of the sixth.²⁶ Thus, for example, the monogram of Symbaticius placed within a medallion found in the Triconch Church (Fig. 6.3c) is similar to the monumental monogram of King Theoderic (Fig. 6.3b): both have a cross in their upper field.²⁷ As in the Italian cases, the monograms on capitals also almost certainly originated in churches, where they encoded the names of donors. Charlotte Roueché sees this new practice as symptomatic of a novel, late antique epigraphic trend, wherein epigrams ceased to be interpreted as 'a formal civic document of public record' and instead became a means to offer 'idiosyncratic honours to individuals'. From the sixth century onwards, she states,

²³ Bloch, 'The Pagan Revival', pp. 204–5.

²⁴ Guidobaldi, 'I capitelli'; and Brandenburg, *Die frühchristlichen Kirchen*, p. 155, fig. 90.

²⁵ Deichmann, *Ravenna*, vol. 2.2, pp. 206–30; Sodini, 'Marques', pp. 503–10; Sodini, 'Marble and Stoneworking', p. 134.

²⁶ Roueché, *Aphrodisias*, VII.15–17, nos. 101–3 and plate xxvii.

²⁷ Roueché, *Aphrodisias*, no. 101 and plate xxvii. The capitals with the monogram of Symbaticius belong to a type dated to the sixth century; see Sodini, 'Marble Capitals', p. 189.

epigraphic inscriptions began to fulfil an important decorative function, and monumental monograms combined well with other carved decorations in churches.²⁸ The evidence from Aphrodisias also suggests that, although the earliest datable examples of monumental monograms seem to derive from Italy, it is highly probable that the practice began first in the Greek East in the decades before St Polyeuktos was rebuilt in Constantinople.

6.2. JUSTINIAN I, THEODORA, AND A DEFENSIVE RESPONSE: STS SERGIUS AND BACCHUS (c.527–32)

Justinian I did not take lightly the monumental challenge of Anicia Juliana's refoundation of St Polyeuktos, and at some stage before his imperial elevation to *augustus* he founded a church of Sts Sergius and Bacchus. Attached to the Hormisdas Palace, the church abutted the home of Justinian and his spouse Theodora during the reign of his uncle, Emperor Justin I (518–27). The dates and circumstances of the church's construction have been a controversial matter since the 1970s. Cyril Mango thought it was built to provide a place of worship to a community of Monophysite refugee monks between 527 (or 531) and 536, arguing that Theodora played a crucial role in its foundation.²⁹ Richard Krautheimer and Thomas Mathews have separately challenged both the alleged impetus for the church's construction and Mango's proposed date-range, but these claims have been reiterated in a somewhat modified form by Jonathan Bardill.³⁰ Yet Brian Croke's recent re-evaluation of the existing evidence puts forward a strong argument against the Mango-Bardill thesis. Croke has questioned the connection between the church's construction and the alleged community of Monophysite monks in Hormisdas. More importantly for our discussion, Croke has also advanced a strong case for placing the start of construction before 1 April 527, when Justinian's imperial elevation to the status of Justin's co-ruler occurred. The building is thus interpreted by Croke and certain other scholars as Justinian's programmatic response to the construction of St Polyeuktos.³¹

Croke also refers to Justinian's inauguration as caesar—probably in the second half of 525—as a possible impetus for the foundation of Sts Sergius and Bacchus: from that time on, Justinian's status as 'second emperor' would have meant he needed his own court and ceremonial space.³² Since the nave entablature describes both Justinian and Theodora as emperor/empress and *augusti*, the church was most likely conceived of in the mid-520s and completed between April 527 and c.532.

²⁸ Roueché, *Aphrodisias*, Introduction.10–12.

²⁹ Mango, 'The Church of Saints Sergius and Bacchus at Constantinople'; Mango, 'The Church of Sts. Sergius and Bacchus Once Again'.

³⁰ Krautheimer, 'Again Saints Sergius and Bacchus'; Mathews, 'Architecture'; Bardill, 'The Church'. For a new argument in favour of a later date, namely between 532 and 536, see Bardill, 'The Date, Dedication'. The latter article has appeared too late to be taken fully into account in my text.

³¹ Croke, 'Justinian, Theodora', pp. 26–63.

³² Croke, 'Justinian, Theodora', p. 29; Croke, 'Justinian under Justin', pp. 44–6.

The military saint to whom the church was originally dedicated, St Sergius, was a pertinent choice for Justinian given his earlier military career, while the nave entablature has recently been read as an indirect response to Juliana's epigram in St Polyeuktos.³³ In 524, Justinian had finally overcome the legal and personal objections that had marred his official marriage to Theodora. Both became patri-cians, and Justinian received the title of *nobilissimus* shortly after, making him in formal terms the equal of Anicia Juliana.³⁴ Yet Justinian's pedestrian military back-ground and Theodora's earlier career as a circus dancer hardly made them equal in the eyes of the public to the noble woman of imperial descent.

In this historical context, the construction of the Church of Sts Sergius and Bacchus would have allowed the imperial couple to respond to Juliana's symbolic challenge to their nascent status. The new church was decorated with gilded mosa-ics and carvings, and it is possible that the carvers who had previously worked on St Polyeuktos were employed in the construction of Justinian's church. Sts Sergius and Bacchus could not match Juliana's church in size, but surpassed it in other respects. While the interior of St Polyeuktos featured columns and piers made of local white Proconnesian marble, Justinian and Theodora's church was embellished with expensive columns made of green verd-antique (*breccia*) marble from Thessaly and red Synnada marble from Phrygia. At that time, these coloured marbles were well-known symbols of power and status,³⁵ and Justinian I did not miss the oppor-tunity to demonstrate his newly acquired imperial status through such symbolic means. His new church also had several innovative features, including an octagonal central part covered with a dome.³⁶ While the column capitals feature monograms, unlike those of St Polyeuktos they neither present the name of a saint nor optative messages. Instead, they communicate the names and titles of the founders, Justinian and Theodora. All the monograms face the inner octagon; none appear on the sides that face the inner passageways and galleries. As such, they were designed as graphic signs of authority for the ruling couple, addressing any visitor who stood in the church's central area. They undoubtedly showed that this building was, first and foremost, the church of Justinian and Theodora, and only then of St Sergius, who occupied a secondary and subordinate position of importance.

In their arguments regarding the origins of the church, both Bardill (in 2000) and Croke refer to the description of the monumental monograms of Justinian and Theodora furnished by H. Swainson more than a century ago.³⁷ These scholars postulate that because the Church of Sts Sergius and Bacchus does not feature the *ΑΥΤΟΥΚΤΑ* monogram that one can see in Hagia Sophia, the former church must have been completed before c.532–3 when construction of Justinian's Hagia Sophia began.³⁸ Yet Swainson's account of the surviving monograms is seriously

³³ Croke, 'Justinian, Theodora', pp. 49–54.

³⁴ Croke, 'Justinian under Justin', pp. 40–3.

³⁵ Sodini, 'Marble and Stoneworking', pp. 131–2; Melfos, 'Green Thessalian Stone', p. 395.

³⁶ Van Millingen, *Byzantine Churches*, pp. 72–5. Cf. Bardill, 'The Date, Dedication', pp. 105–18.

³⁷ Swainson, 'Monograms'. Cf. Bardill, 'The Date, Dedication', pp. 76–81.

³⁸ Bardill, 'The Church of Sts. Sergius and Bacchus', p. 3; and Croke, 'Justinian, Theodora', p. 49.

flawed. Firstly, as Joachim Kramer has noted,³⁹ there is in fact one *ΑΥΤΟΥΚΤΑ* monogram preserved in the Church of Sts Sergius and Bacchus. Secondly, a peculiar pattern in the spatial distribution of monograms survives in that church that Swainson omits entirely. This latter observation sheds light on both the process of building the church and consequently on its dating, and therefore needs to be brought into this discussion.

Fourteen columns directly face the central opening on each level of the church (Fig. 6.4 and Diagram 6.1). The columns on the ground floor are surmounted with melon capitals featuring monogram medallions on the sides facing the centre. On most capitals the monograms have been erased, although in two cases these seem to have been restored at a later stage, both times erroneously: firstly, as a combination of the letters F, M, and B on a capital in the south-western bay,⁴⁰ and secondly, as a cruciform monogram consisting of the letters O, Y, C, and A on a capital in the southern bay (Fig. 6.5a). Van Millingen deciphered the latter monogram as giving the name of Theodora,⁴¹ probably because of its cruciform shape; the presence of Theodora's cruciform monograms in both Hagia Sophia and Hagia Irene was known to him in the early twentieth century. But the surviving example



Fig. 6.4. Sts Sergius and Bacchus, Istanbul, inner view.

³⁹ Kramer, 'Kämpferkapitelle', p. 185. This observation is duly noted by Unterweger, 'The Image', p. 106, note 62.

⁴⁰ A similar monogram with an additional letter R at the bottom can be seen in Hagia Sophia. Both must have been made in either the early modern or modern period.

⁴¹ Van Millingen, *Byzantine Churches*, p. 73. Cf. Bardill, 'The Date, Dedication', pp. 78–80 and note 49.

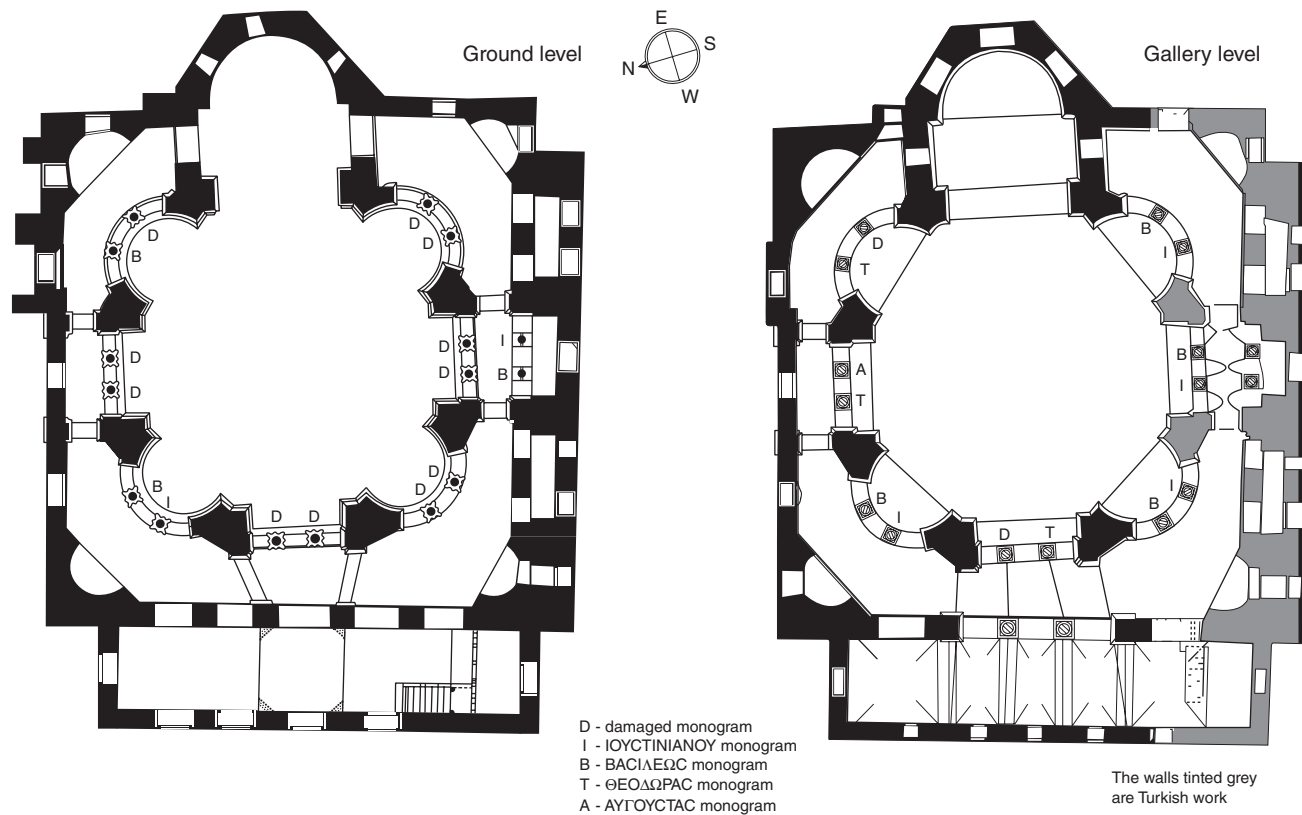


Diagram 6.1. The plan of Sts Sergius and Bacchus.

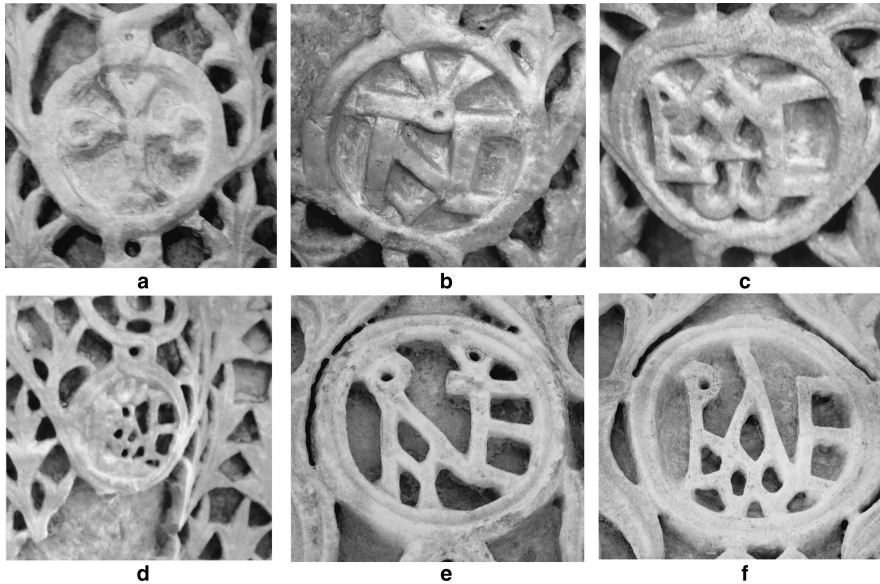


Fig. 6.5. Monumental monograms on the ground level of Sts Sergius and Bacchus: a) southern bay; b–c) north-western bay; d) north-eastern bay; e–f) additional columns in southern bay.

in Sts Sergius and Bacchus includes only some letters of her name and introduces extraneous elements: the upsilon is not present in Theodora's name, while the central cruciform structure can also be read as a letter tau, which is only found in Justinian's name. Additionally, its appearance and much brighter colouring differs from the surrounding surface to the extent that this graphic device might be the result of later restoration using plaster or similar material. One should therefore proceed with especial caution when deploying this peculiar monogram as early Byzantine evidence without closer inspection. Fortunately, two original monograms survive intact on the capitals of the north-western bay, protected by the *müezzin mahfili* built in the Ottoman period when this church was turned into a mosque. The monograms present the name and title of Justinian in the genitive: *IOYCTINIANOY* to the left and *BACIAEΩC* to the right (Fig. 6.5b–c). Another type of the *BACIAEΩC* monogram has also been preserved on a western capital in the north-eastern bay (Fig. 6.5d). These three monograms seem not to have been cut as deep as the surrounding ornament, which may indicate that they were carved after the capitals were installed at their present locations. Behind the southern bay, two additional columns with capitals of a cushion type stand beneath the gallery and display Justinian's monograms towards the central part: *IOYCTINIANOY* to the left and *BACIAEΩC* to the right (Fig. 6.5e–f).

That no trace of the *AYTOYCTAC* box monogram survives on ground-floor capitals suggests that this level might have been completed after Justinian became

caesar but before he and Theodora were proclaimed *augusti*.⁴² The unusual forms of monograms used on the ground floor support this interpretation, since they either present unique or early monogrammatic forms. The main form of the *IOYCTINIANOY* monogram (Fig. 6.5b) in the north-western bay, for instance, copies the main form of Emperor Anastasius' monogram known from his pre-reform bronze coinage and silver stamps.⁴³ But the placement of the letters omicron and upsilon at the top middle field is unique, and was never repeated here or in either Hagia Sophia or Hagia Irene, suggesting that this medallion represents one of the earliest attempts to carve Justinian's monogram when no established form yet existed. The same holds true for the *BACIAEQC* monogram in the same bay (Fig. 6.5c), the style of which differs greatly when compared to other monograms in the church, especially the shape of the letter beta. Furthermore, it places an omega at the bottom, whereas a brief overview of monograms in the gallery of this church as well as on the capitals in Hagia Sophia shows that placing an omega on the top became standard later on. The monograms on the cushion capitals inside the southern bay are also unique, and look as if they were carved somewhere else before they were installed in the church. The circumstances of their production may explain why they look so different to other monograms in the church that were placed on capitals of different types. Justinian's monogram presents a traditional early form (Fig. 6.5e), but it adds a horizontal line attached to its right vertical bar, which does not exist on other *IOYCTINIANOY* monograms in this church. This can be read either as the letter E, not present in Justinian's name, or more likely as an attempt to differentiate between the letter C and T. The *BACIAEQC* monogram (Fig. 6.5f) also has an early form, with an omega below. Furthermore, it adds a unique elongated vertical bar in its alpha to indicate a separate lambda. The only surviving monogram on the ground floor with a form that would prove to become more common later on is the *BACIAEQC* monogram in the north-eastern bay (Fig. 6.5d).

As mentioned above, the number of columns facing the centre of the church on the gallery level matches that on the ground level. While they are smaller than those below and surmounted with Pseudo-Ionic capitals, the gallery-level capitals also feature imperial monograms that face the middle part of the church (Diagram 6.1). Furthermore, all the monograms on the gallery level were carved during the production of the capitals. The combination of the *IOYCTINIANOY* and *BACIAEQC* monograms is visible on four pairs of capitals: on the gallery's south-eastern (Fig. 6.6a–b), southern (Fig. 6.6c–d), south-western (Fig. 6.6e–f), and north-western sides (Fig. 6.6g–h). These monograms present both early forms and those common to Hagia Sophia. The western (Fig. 6.7a), northern (Fig. 6.7b), and north-eastern sides (Fig. 6.7c) of the gallery present the box monogram of Theodora's name in the genitive, a form known to be earlier than her cruciform

⁴² Restoration work in 2003–6 exposed monograms on two capitals in the ground-floor northern triple arch. It is noteworthy that, on these capitals, Theodora's personal monogram was paired not with the *AYTOYCTAC* monogram, but with Justinian's personal monogram. On these monograms, see Bardill, 'The Date, Dedication', pp. 78–9.

⁴³ Dodd, *Byzantine Silver Stamps*, table II, no. 2; Eastmond, 'Monograms', pp. 229–30.

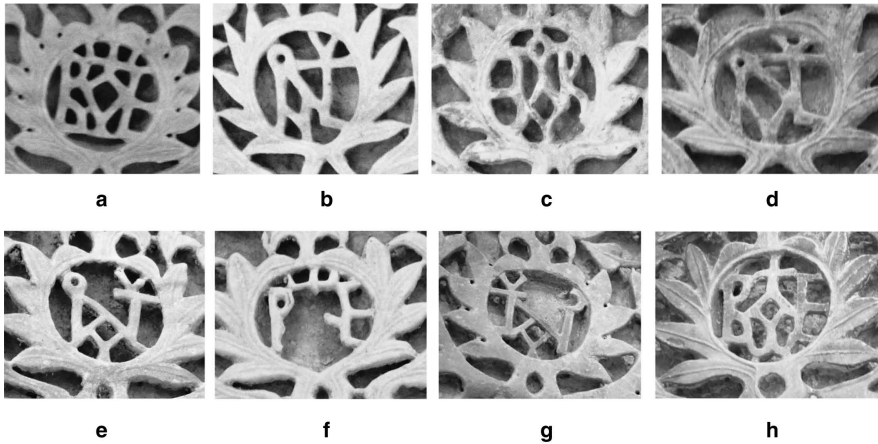


Fig. 6.6. *BACIAEΩC* and *IOYCTINIANOY* monograms on the gallery level of Sts Sergius and Bacchus: a–b) south-eastern side; c–d) southern side; e–f) south-western side; g–h) north-western side.

monograms in Hagia Sophia. The title monogram, which must have accompanied the *ΘEOΔΩPAC* monogram on the above sides of the gallery, has been effaced in two instances and has only survived on the northern side, where it presents the *AYTOYCTAC* monogram well known from Hagia Sophia (Fig. 6.7d). It is noteworthy that the surviving monograms in the north-western bay and in the gallery above it feature the same name, *basileus* Justinian, while in contrast the *BACIAEOC* monogram in the north-eastern bay does not correspond to Theodora's monogram above it.

The spatial distribution of the monograms in the Church of Sts Sergius and Bacchus, along with their differing modes of production, suggests that the ground floor of the church was probably constructed before Justinian and Theodora were proclaimed *augusti* on 1 April 527. At that time, some uncertainty evidently surrounded the issue of which particular monograms should be used in the church, and the capitals were consequently ordered with blank medallions. As suggested by Croke, the construction of the church might have started in *c.* 525 when Justinian was elevated to the position of caesar. At the time when his monograms were somewhat haphazardly carved on the capitals, no established form of his name and title yet existed, which explains the peculiar monogrammatic forms on the ground floor. The adoption of Anastasius' monogram that included all the letters of Justinian's name, and the appropriation of the *BACIAEOC* monogram, both graphically expressed Justinian's newly acquired imperial status. The gallery level was constructed after the imperial couple had become *augusti*, a development that allowed them to add the monograms of Theodora's name and title on that level. The gallery level was probably completed before construction began on Justinian's Hagia Sophia and Hagia Irene in 532, since Sts Sergius and Bacchus lacks a cruciform monogram of Theodora, which appeared in those two later churches. The specific combination of name and title monograms on capitals seems to have been

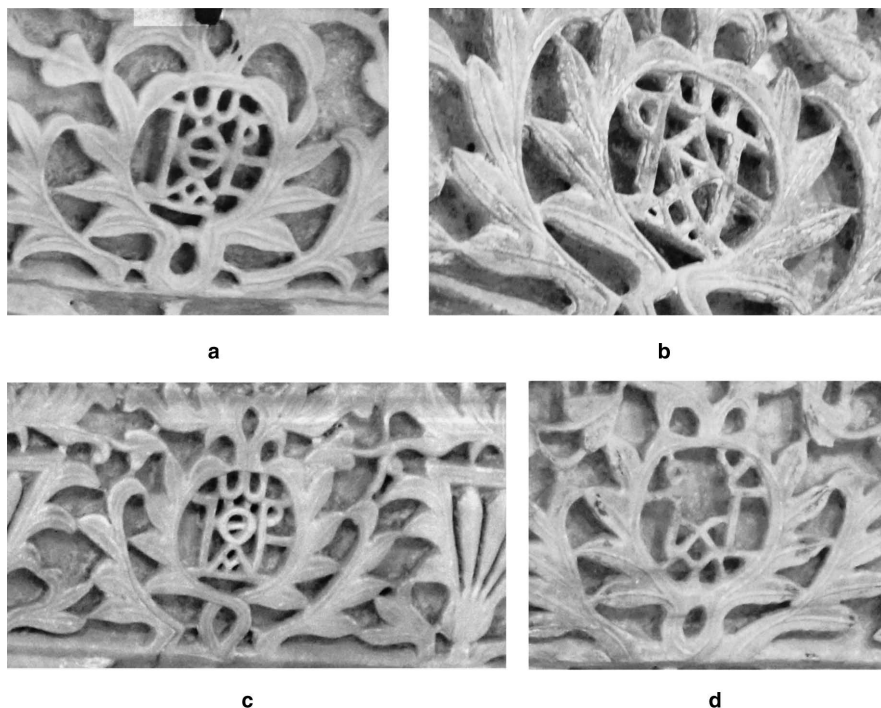


Fig. 6.7. Monumental monograms on the gallery level of Sts Sergius and Bacchus: a–c) $\Theta\epsilon\omicron\Delta\omega\pi\alpha\varsigma$ monograms; d) $\Lambda\Upsilon\tau\omicron\Upsilon\chi\tau\alpha\varsigma$ monogram.

invented specifically for Sts Sergius and Bacchus, where each bay and side have two columns. These monograms were carved side by side so that they could be decoded together: ‘of Emperor Justinian’ and ‘of Augusta Theodora’. Unlike the monograms in St Polyeuktos, they were intended both to represent accessible and unambiguous signs of authority for the new imperial couple, and to communicate to the viewer the couple’s familiarity with the late antique aristocratic culture of calligraphic display.

The distribution of monograms in Sts Sergius and Bacchus also suggests that it was not originally built as a monastic church, but for the use of both men and women, with a division made between male (southern) and female (northern) sides that was common to large Byzantine churches.⁴⁴ It is also possible that Theodora’s monograms marked not only the female side of the church but the place she and her female attendants occupied in the northern and north-eastern sides of the gallery during services, while the entire southern side was reserved for the emperor and his male followers. The imperial metatorion must have also been situated on the southern side, as it was in the later church of Hagia Sophia. The

⁴⁴ Mathews, *The Early Churches*, pp. 130–4; Karras, ‘Female Deacons’, p. 286 and note 62; Britt, ‘Fama’, p. 128.

description of traditional annual imperial visits to Sts Sergius and Bacchus included in the tenth-century *De ceremoniis* does not contradict this interpretation.⁴⁵

To summarize, the imperial monograms in the Church of Sts Sergius and Bacchus were conceived of as monumental signs of imperial authority intended for public display. Unlike the monumental monograms in St Polyeuktos, they were limited to two pairs, to ensure viewers would easily comprehend them as presenting the names and titles of the imperial couple. To distinguish visually between the title monograms of Justinian and Theodora, the latter employed the title Augusta, the highest title available for a Byzantine empress. This newly invented pattern of monogrammatic usage was then applied in Hagia Sophia and other imperial foundations inside and outside Constantinople.

6.3. THE MONOGRAMMATIC DISPLAY OF IMPERIAL AUTHORITY IN HAGIA SOPHIA (532–7)

Justinian's Hagia Sophia was built in the years 532–7, following the Nika riots (532) when his lack of legitimacy had become most apparent, and the need for a grandiose public display of imperial authority thus became most urgent. The emperor responded to this challenge by making an unparalleled investment in the construction of a new magnificent church, which provided him with unprecedented symbolic settings for the remaining part of his reign. In addition, he prohibited the building of churches in Constantinople without imperial approval, so that no noble would have a chance to challenge the emperor in this sphere again.⁴⁶ The destruction of the original church on the site of Hagia Sophia during the riots allowed the emperor to rebuild it on a scale unmatched by his imperial predecessors. It equalled St Polyeuktos in size and decoration,⁴⁷ and surpassed it in other respects. Its architectural elements were constructed not only of local Proconnesian and Thessalian verd-antique marbles, as were some in the church of Sts Sergius and Bacchus, but also of more precious 'imperial' marbles, namely green porphyry from Peloponnese and red porphyry from Egypt. The building's eight longest columns in the exedras, for instance, were made of the latter Egyptian marble.⁴⁸

The new Hagia Sophia was built by two renowned architects, Anthemios of Tralles and Isidoros of Miletus, who diligently utilized their knowledge of Graeco-Roman mathematics and astronomy to position and construct the building so that its inner spaces were illuminated with daylight in the best possible way, thus

⁴⁵ Nor can this general description corroborate this interpretation beyond doubt: Constantine Porphyrogenitos, *The Book of Ceremonies*, 1. 11, trans. Moffatt and Tall, vol. 1, pp. 86–9; van Millingen, *Byzantine Churches*, pp. 69–70.

⁴⁶ Bell, *Social Conflict*, pp. 306–8 and 319–36.

⁴⁷ Mainstone, *Hagia Sophia*, pp. 147–8.

⁴⁸ Mango, *Hagia Sophia*, p. xxxix; Sodini, 'Marble and Stoneworking', pp. 132–3; and Mainstone, *Hagia Sophia*, pp. 187–98. Red porphyry from Egypt was not accessible at that time and the column shafts made of this marble, which differ slightly in length, were probably taken as *spolia* from classical sites.

creating—in Procopius' words—a true 'temple of light'.⁴⁹ This light was in turn perceived as the visual manifestation of divine immanence within this church dedicated to Holy Wisdom.⁵⁰ Being inside this building was and remains an impressive visual experience (Fig. 6.8), and the designers of the church utilized various optical effects in order to unlock the religious imagination of its visitors. In short, the visual programme of Hagia Sophia was thoroughly planned, and a systematic use of imperial monograms on its capitals doubtlessly formed an intended element of that original design. As emphasized by Paul the Silentiary, both God and Emperor were honoured in this church,⁵¹ and their graphic signs were ubiquitous inside. The symbol of the divine Lord, the cross, adorned the dome mosaic and was visible from any spot in the nave,⁵² while various forms of the cross were woven into aniconic mosaics in other parts of the original sixth-century church.⁵³ This graphic sign of God was accompanied by the monograms of Justinian I and Theodora on capitals (Fig. 6.9), as if their monogrammatic symbols functioned as graphic mediators between the primary symbol of the divine and the building's visitors who stood beneath. Such a visual arrangement echoes Deacon Agapetos' statement addressed to Justinian in the second quarter of the sixth century: 'In his bodily essence, the emperor is equal of every man, but in the power of his rank he is like God over all men. He has no one on earth who is higher than he.'⁵⁴ The imperial couple's monograms faithfully visualize this perception of their exalted status to any church attendant standing below one of these columns on either level and being able to view the imperial monograms and their constituent letters at a distance of approximately five to eight metres. Through their graphic devices, Justinian and Theodora's imperial power was omnipresent in the church, and most visitors were probably able to grasp this visual message of imperial authority.

The capitals in the church's numerous colonnades are carved with monograms on the sides facing the nave and the aisles or galleries, while some capitals surmounting columns set against walls in the aisles feature a monogram only on the side directly facing their viewers. In total, forty monograms were carved on the ground floor, and fifty-nine were probably originally carved on the gallery level, adding up to a grand total of ninety-nine, a figure perhaps chosen intentionally. Ninety-nine is the age at which Abraham was circumcised (Genesis, 17. 24), an act symbolizing his covenant with God. Ninety-nine is also the numerical value of the letters in the Greek word *AMHN* (1 + 40 + 8 + 50 = 99)—an affirmative interjection paramount within Christian liturgy. At the same time, ninety-nine represented

⁴⁹ Schibille, 'Astronomical and Optical Principles'. For a more detailed discussion of the idea that the design of Hagia Sophia accommodated the Neoplatonic ideas of beauty and light, and their Pseudo-Dionysian adaptations, see Schibille, *Hagia Sophia*. For the probable Neoplatonic cultural background of the two architects, see Kaldellis, 'The Making of Hagia Sophia'.

⁵⁰ Schibille, *Hagia Sophia*, pp. 27–31.

⁵¹ Paul the Silentiary, *Description of Hagia Sophia*, Prologue, 1–2, trans. Bell, p. 189; Bell, *Social Conflict*, p. 333.

⁵² Mango, ed., *The Art of the Byzantine Empire*, p. 83.

⁵³ For the detailed discussion of original mosaics and relevant bibliography, see Schibille, *Hagia Sophia*, pp. 109–39.

⁵⁴ Agapetos, *Advice to the Emperor Justinian*, 21, trans. Bell, p. 107.



Fig. 6.8. Hagia Sophia, Istanbul, inner view.

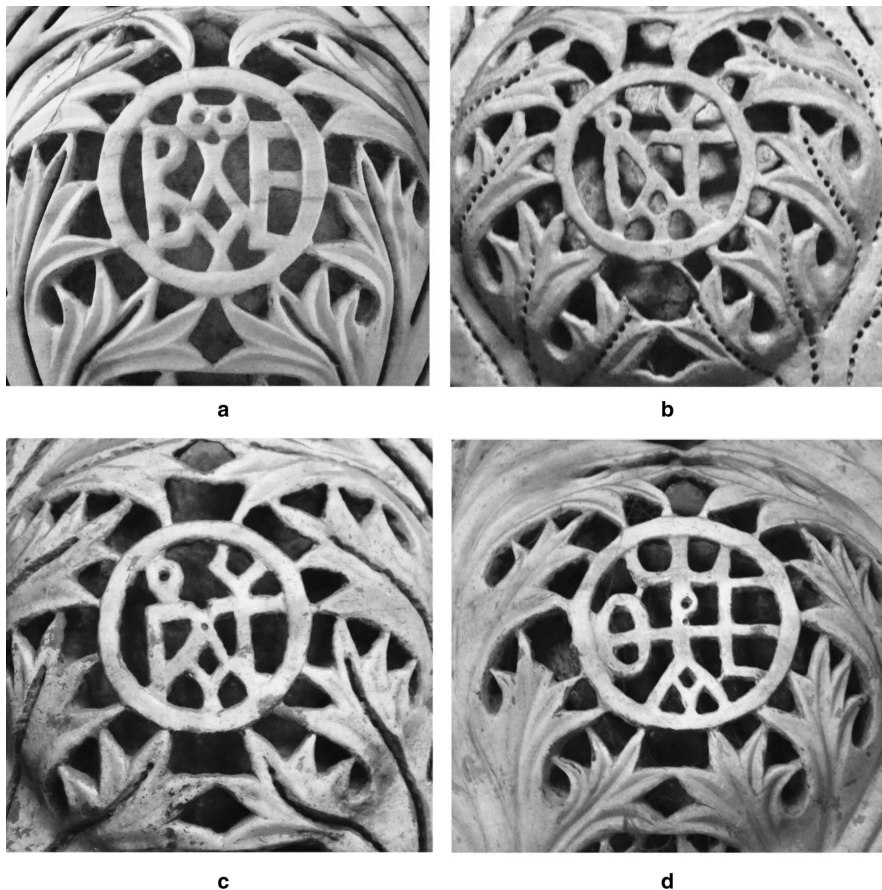


Fig. 6.9. Imperial monograms in Hagia Sophia: a) *BACIAEΩC*; b) *IOYCTINIANOY*; c) *AYTOYCTAC*; d) *ΘEOΔΩPAC*.

an important aspect of the architects' calculations for the building's central piers and the related size of its original dome. Modern research suggests that the side length of the square space created by the nave's four huge piers was calculated as ninety-nine Byzantine feet.⁵⁵

The monograms encode in the genitive the same imperial names and titles as those in the Church of Sts Sergius and Bacchus. While monograms that visualize the name and title of Justinian (*βασιλέως Ιουστινιανού*) and Theodora's title (*Αυγούστας*) generally employ consistent forms in various parts of the building, monogrammatic forms of the empress's name (*Θεοδώρας*) demonstrate greater variety (Fig. 6.10.2–3). This difference probably stemmed from the fact that by 532 Justinian's monograms were already used in other media, and had acquired a

⁵⁵ Svenshon and Stichel, "Systems of Nomads"; and Schibille, *Hagia Sophia*, p. 53.

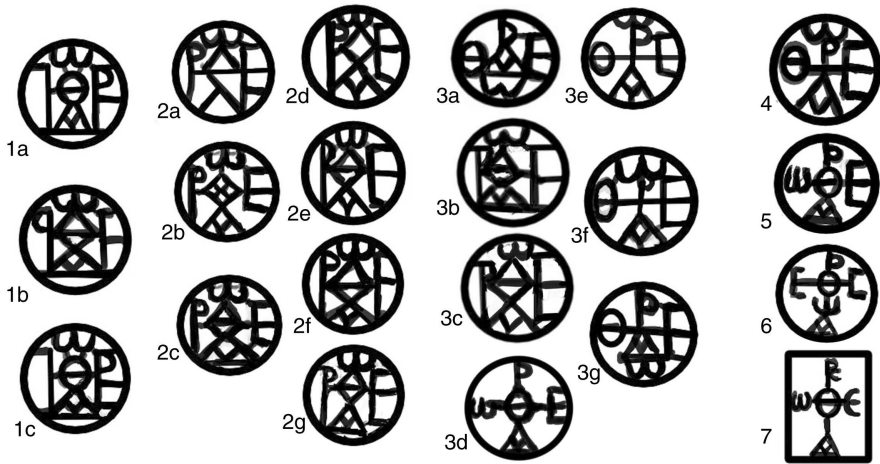


Fig. 6.10. Theodora's monumental monograms: 1. in Sts Sergius and Bacchus; 2. in the southern side of Hagia Sophia (2a–c: ground floor; 2d–g: gallery); 3. in the northern side of Hagia Sophia (3a–e: ground floor; 3f–g: gallery); 4. in Hagia Irena; 5. on a capital from the Archaeological Museum of Istanbul, originally from Hebdoman; 6. in St John of Ephesos; 7. on bronze plaques in Hagia Sophia.

semi-official status. In contrast, Theodora's personal monogram might have been developed in connection with its use on capitals placed in churches built by Justinian and his imperial spouse. As a result, master carvers must have had a strong influence on the appearance of variants of Theodora's monogram in different places. Comparison of her personal monograms in Hagia Sophia (Fig. 6.10.2–3) with those in other ecclesiastical foundations sponsored by the imperial couple—such as Sts Sergius and Bacchus (Fig. 6.7a–c and Fig. 6.10.1), Hagia Irene (Fig. 6.10.4), and St John of Ephesos (Fig. 6.10.6)—shows considerable difference in the form of her monogram as it appeared in different churches.

Moreover, a noticeable discrepancy exists between Theodora's personal monograms on the northern side of Hagia Sophia, and those on the southern side. A ninth-century anonymous tale recounting the church's construction states that Hagia Sophia was built by two competing teams of masters and workmen, each of whom erected one of these sides until they eventually coalesced at the western and eastern ends as well as at the building's dome.⁵⁶ The appearance of Theodora's monogram supports this version of events, since its various forms show independent development of this visual sign on each side. In other words, masters carving on one side seem to have designed her personal monograms separately from those working on the other side. The 'southern team' consistently used the same monogrammatic type on both levels of the church, which is closely related to one example of Theodora's monogram carved in Sts Sergius and Bacchus (Fig. 6.10.1–2). The

⁵⁶ A relevant excerpt from this *Narratio de S. Sophia* appears in Mango, ed., *The Art of the Byzantine Empire*, p. 96.

'northern team' started with the same graphic form at the central colonnade on the ground floor, but whilst still working on that level they began to develop a new cruciform form of Theodora's monogrammatic name (Fig. 6.10.3a–e) that was subsequently applied more consistently on the gallery level (Fig. 6.10.3f–g). These cruciform forms were then imitated in Hagia Irene (Fig. 6.10.4) and in a building in Hebdomon (Fig. 6.10.5). This epigraphic innovation exemplified the invention and rising popularity of the cruciform monogrammatic type in early Byzantium in the second quarter of the sixth century.

Each of the sixteen ground-level columns facing the nave originally featured both imperial personal monograms on two corroded plaques, mounted on the bronze hoops that fastened column shafts to their capitals; traces of these monograms are still in evidence on some plaques. Both monograms have identical forms and alternately face the nave and aisles.⁵⁷ Theodora's cruciform monogram (Fig. 6.10.7) differs here from those on the capitals, and the hoops and plaques were most likely cast in a separate workshop in the final years of the church's construction.

After the completion of Hagia Sophia, a joint cruciform monogram of the imperial couple was also carved on the marble panels of its templon screen. Paul the Silentiary makes special mention of that particular monogrammatic device, in a revealing account of the viewers' perception of such graphic signs: 'on the middle panels of the sacred screen which form a barrier round the sanctified priests, the carver's tool has incised one character that means many words, for it combines the names of the Empress and Emperor. It is like a shield with a boss in whose middle part has been carved the sign of the cross.'⁵⁸ The panels featuring this monogram have not survived, but the existence of such a joint imperial monogram is corroborated by a later joint monogram of Justin II and Empress Sophia that survives on their coinage (Fig. 5.4). A comparable example of an imperial cruciform monogram carved on a marble templon screen has survived in Hagia Irene, where it was repurposed as part of the floor under one of the columns on the northern side of the church (Fig. 6.11). That screen shows the cruciform monogram of Emperor Constantine, traditionally associated with Constantine V (741–75), who rebuilt that church after an earthquake in 740.⁵⁹

While masters on each team evidently had some freedom in the forms of the monograms they carved, the spatial distribution of these graphic devices in the church might have been decided by their superiors. It is of course possible that the masters could not always follow such instructions correctly, especially because the monograms *IOYCTINIANOY* and *AYTOYCTAC* have very similar silhouettes. It is

⁵⁷ Antoniadēs, *Ekphrasis tes Hagias Sophias*, vol. 2, p. 32; and Unterweger, 'The Image', p. 106 and note 62.

⁵⁸ Paulus Silentiarius, *Descriptio Sanctae Sophiae*, 713–15, ed. de Stefani, p. 49. The English translation is from Mango, ed., *The Art of the Byzantine Empire*, pp. 87–8, with a slight modification. Fobelli, *Un tempio*, pp. 183–4, fig. 40, suggests that Silentiarius referred in this passage to two separate monograms of the imperial couple and uses a separate box monogram for each of them in her graphic reconstruction of the templon screens.

⁵⁹ Brubaker and Haldon, *Byzantium*, p. 214.



Fig. 6.11. Fragment of a chancel screen with Constantine's monogram reused in Hagia Irene, Istanbul.

also possible that some capitals might have been set by workmen so that their monograms faced the wrong sides. Moreover, the later restoration of some damaged monograms has partially obscured their original spatial distribution, since it was always Justinian's monograms that were reconstructed on those occasions. Despite such reservations, the distribution of the monograms reveals certain patterns. Thus, for example, the north-eastern and south-eastern aisles, closest to the clergy in the solea, preserve only Justinian's monograms on their capitals (Diagram 6.2). The north-eastern and south-eastern exedras are believed to have been reserved for male singers,⁶⁰ so the omission of Theodora's monograms in this part of the church may have been intentional. Her monograms, meanwhile, are abundant on the capitals in the south-western and north-western bays of the gallery level, reserved for the exclusive use of women (Diagram 6.3). The western gallery was later known as the place where an empress and her followers positioned themselves during worship, and Theodora's graphic signs symbolically frame precisely that location. Most of them adorned the inner sides of colonnades and thus directly faced female visitors. In short, the spatial distribution of Justinian's and Theodora's monograms in Hagia Sophia probably reflected the builders' understanding of how laity and clergy, as well as men and women, would be separated inside the church during services. Justinian's monograms were evidently seen as more appropriate for clergy, while Theodora's monograms were destined for a female audience.

The application of monumental monograms in Sts Sergius and Bacchus and Hagia Sophia established a practice later imitated in other imperial foundations

⁶⁰ Mango, ed., *The Art of the Byzantine Empire*, p. 81; Mainstone, *Hagia Sophia*, p. 229.

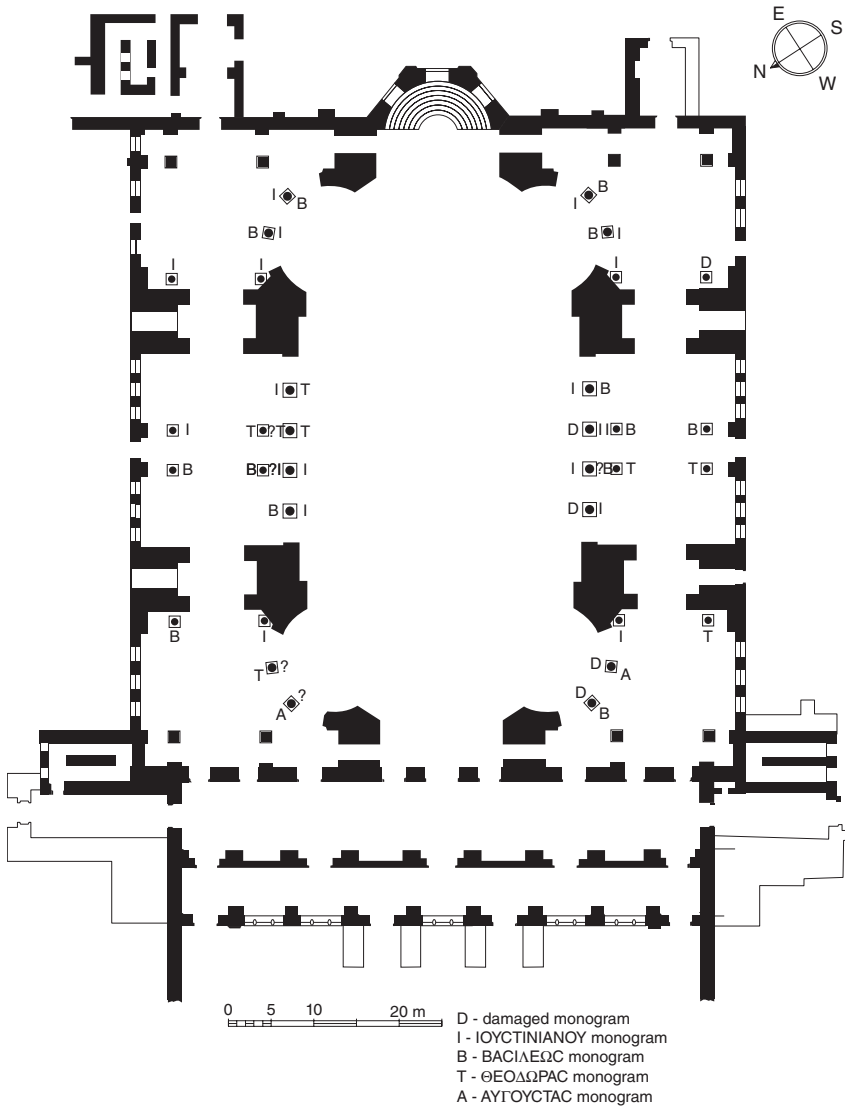


Diagram 6.2. The ground level of Hagia Sophia.

during Justinian's reign. Hagia Irene, rebuilt along with Hagia Sophia after the Nika revolt, featured the same four imperial monograms on its capitals (Fig. 6.12a–d).⁶¹ The personal graphic signs of Justinian and Theodora were carved onto four sides of a capital found in Hebdomon,⁶² an imperial residence in the suburbs of

⁶¹ Van Millingen, *Byzantine Churches*, pp. 84–105. They are accompanied by the sign of the cross on the columns' opposite sides.

⁶² Currently in the Archaeological Museum of Istanbul, inv. no. 1239 T; see Sodini, Barsanti, and Guidobaldi, 'La sculpture', p. 332, note 150; Kramer, 'Kämpferkapitel', pp. 183–4; and Taddei, 'Notes', p. 79.

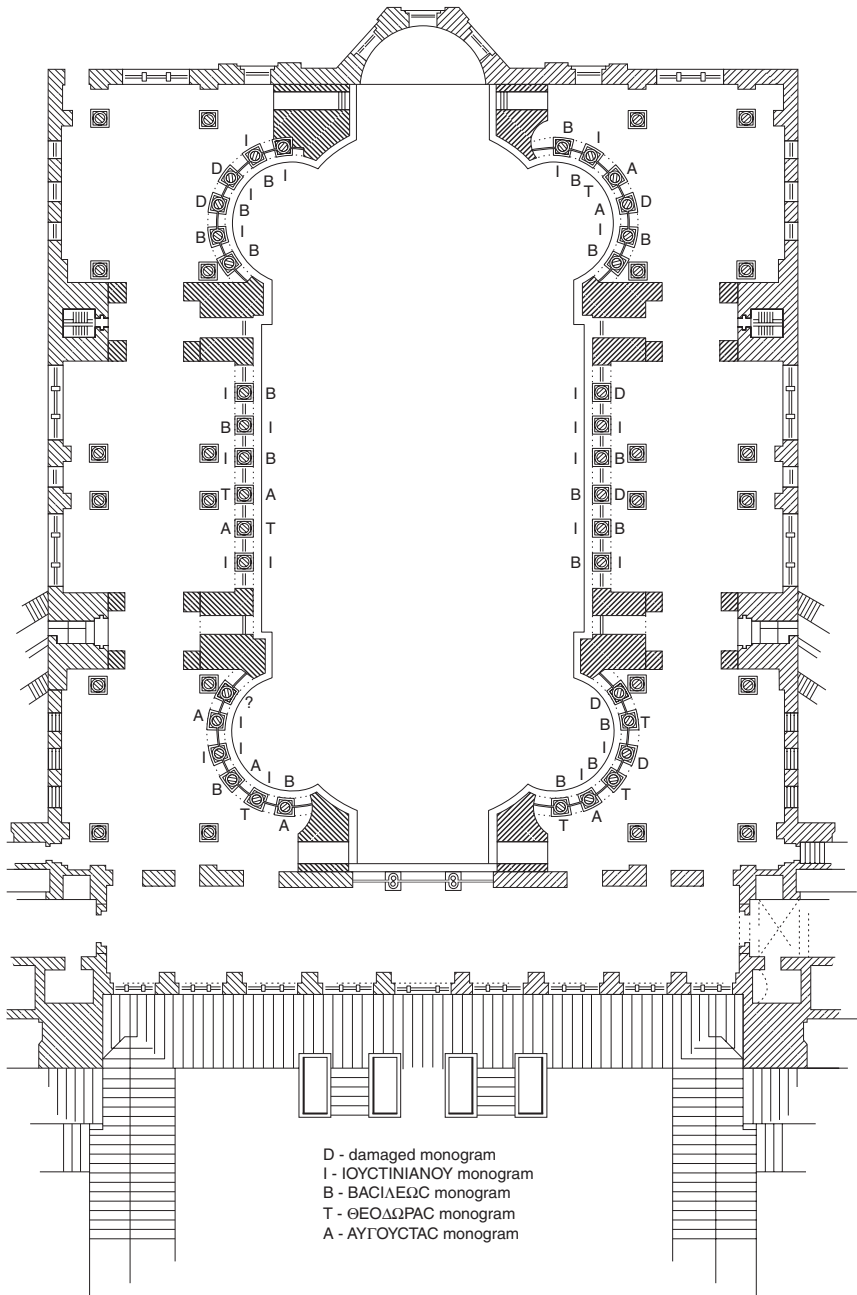


Diagram 6.3. The gallery level of Hagia Sophia.

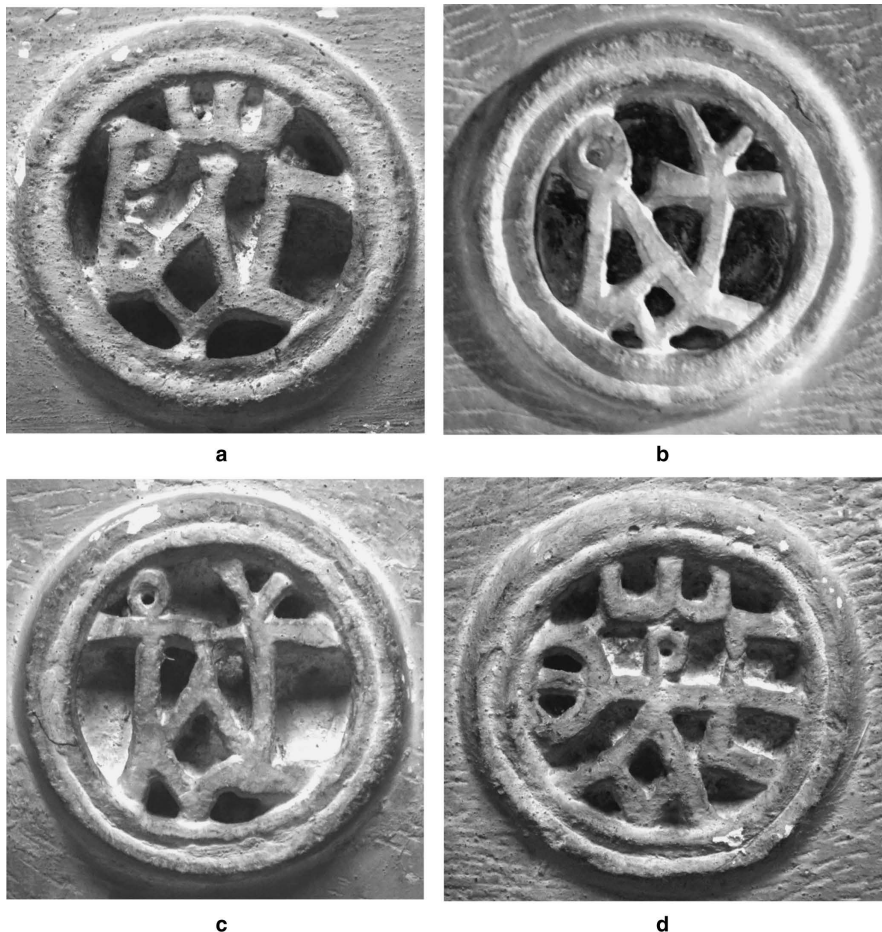


Fig. 6.12. Imperial monograms in Hagia Irene, Istanbul: a) *BACIAEΩC*; b) *IOYCTINIANOY*; c) *AYTOYCTAC*; d) *ΘEOΔΩPAC*.

Constantinople, and on another capital discovered in Germia. The latter find probably reflects an imperial donation made to the Church of St Michael in that town.⁶³ Imperial involvement in the reconstruction of another church in Asia Minor, namely the Church of St John in Ephesos (c.535/6–41), is better documented,⁶⁴ and the church featured capitals with the same two monograms.⁶⁵

⁶³ Niewöhner and Rheidt, 'Die Michaelskirche', p. 138, fig. 2, and p. 143; Unterweger, 'The Image', p. 101. A capital with the cruciform monogram similar to those of Theodora has also been found in Libyssa, modern Gebze, on the north-eastern coast of the Sea of Marmara; see Arachne Database, no. 150892.

⁶⁴ Alchermes, 'Art', p. 359; Thiel, *Die Johanneskirche*, p. 102; and Unterweger, 'The Image', p. 101.

⁶⁵ *Die Inschriften von Ephesos*, ed. Vettters, vol. 8.2, no. 4363; Hueber, *Ephesos*, figs 131a–b; Kramer, 'Kämpferkapitelle', p. 185; and Artamonov's Collection at the Dumbarton Oaks Research Library and Collection, reacession no. ICFA.NA.0452.

Significantly, Justinian and Theodora's title monograms, *BACIAEΩC* and *AYTOYCTAC*, have almost never been found outside the three Constantinopolitan churches discussed above.⁶⁶

The prevalence of Justinian's monogram in the imperial capital and its closest surroundings was likely to have been even higher than the cases discussed above suggest. Two capitals with his monogram, for instance, have been discovered in the area of the church of Pegé, while another capital featuring his monogrammatic sign was brought from Constantinople and re-used in San Marco Cathedral in Venice during the high Middle Ages.⁶⁷ His monogram also adorns a marble plaque attached to the ambo discovered in the remains of an early Christian church in Yalova Caplicari, an Asian coastal city facing the Sea of Marmara.⁶⁸ Yet the most vivid example of Justinian's personal graphic sign carved for public display was preserved in medieval Constantinople on the Maritime Gate of the Great Palace, where an impressive frieze with a large monogram of Justinian was reused as an imposing symbol of imperial authority.⁶⁹ The evidence of this monumental device is complemented by that of a marble statuette of an imperial eagle, currently held in Istanbul's Archaeological Museum, measuring 64 cm in height and featuring a medallion with Justinian's monogram carved on its upper chest. Similar to the marble eagles on the base of the column of Arcadius (c.402/3), this traditional imperial symbol must have originally decorated a public monument erected in the sixth-century Byzantine capital.⁷⁰

Justinian's imperial successors continued the practice of inscribing monumental monograms onto their foundations, albeit on a smaller scale. Thus, a capital with carved cruciform monograms of Justin II (565–78) and his wife Sophia has been found at the hot baths of Yalova Caplicari,⁷¹ while a cruciform monogram of Emperor Phocas (602–10) survives on a capital now located in the Afyonkarahisar Museum in Afyon, western Turkey.⁷² Excavations in the remains of the Hippodrome in Istanbul have revealed another capital featuring a monogrammatic sign of Phocas.⁷³ The above-mentioned marble screen decorated with the monogram of Constantine V at Hagia Irene testifies to the imperial use of monumental monograms in the eighth century, while a capital with a cruciform monogram dated to the eleventh or twelfth century found at the Tekfur Saray Byzantine palace in

⁶⁶ One capital with the *BACIAEΩC* monogram that had probably been brought from Constantinople was reused in the courtyard of the Venetian monastery of Sant'Apollonia. See Deichmann, ed., *Corpus*, p. 137, no. 638.

⁶⁷ Deichmann, ed., *Corpus*, pp. 109–10, no. 473.

⁶⁸ Kramer, 'Kämpferkapitelle', pp. 177–8.

⁶⁹ Washington, DC, Dumbarton Oaks, Nicholas V. Artamonoff Collection, reassesion no. ICFA. NA.0123; Mango, 'Ancient Spolia', p. 647, fig. 8; Asutay-Effenberger, *Die Landmauer*, pp. 194–5.

⁷⁰ Arachne Database, no. 7809. Cf. Mendel, *Catalogue*, vol. 2, pp. 434–5, no. 657, who erroneously attributed the monogram to Emperor Julian.

⁷¹ Cameron, 'The Artistic Patronage', p. 73; and Kramer, 'Kämpferkapitelle', pp. 175–90.

⁷² Sodini, Barsanti, and Guidobaldi, 'La sculpture', p. 314, fig. 13.

⁷³ It was found during excavations in 1927, but has since been destroyed. For more details and references, see Brück, *Falkkapitelle*, p. 66, note 516.

Istanbul bears witness to the continuation of the early Byzantine tradition of monogrammatic display in the middle Byzantine period.⁷⁴

6.4. MONUMENTAL MONOGRAMS AND EARLY MEDIEVAL BISHOPS

The impressive churches of Justinian I and Theodora highlight a practice that became popular in sixth-century Byzantium, namely placing monumental monograms of noble donors in churches that were built with their sponsorship. The cruciform graphic sign of Theodora on such monuments also popularized a new type of monogram, which enjoyed increasing popularity from the mid-sixth century onwards. This new monogrammatic type exemplified the paramount importance of the sign of the cross in early Byzantium, and many forms of the cruciform monogram featured letters that were attached to the arms of the cross without any letter in the middle. This new trend is evinced, for example, by two marble capitals found in Aphrodisias, inscribed with the cruciform monograms of Mamas and Pakos; the pair were probably donors to an unidentified church in that city.⁷⁵

The imperial tradition of marking imperial foundations with monumental monograms was soon imitated by church leaders in various early Byzantine cities. Thus, a capital with a cruciform monogram consisting of the letters *A*, *N*, *Y*, and *Ω* at the ends of its cross-arms, and *O* at its middle, has been found at the site of the remains of an early Christian basilica in Tomis (modern Constanza in Romania), an important metropolitan see in the sixth century. The monogram seems likely to have encoded the name of a local metropolitan bishop John in the genitive (*Ιωάννου*).⁷⁶ A comparable example from Greek Epirus has been provided by the find of a capital with a cruciform monogram of Bishop Dumetios, *ΔΟΥΜΕΤΙΟΥ*, during excavations of a church in Nicopolis, the so-called basilica A dated approximately to the mid-sixth century.⁷⁷

More examples survive in Asia Minor. The cruciform monogram *Ιωαννου* has been preserved in the medallion of an architrave fragment in the episcopal chapel in Side, a metropolitan see on the south-eastern coast of Asia Minor.⁷⁸ Furthermore, in the *Koimesis* church in Nicea, a cruciform monogram of Abbot Hyakinthos was carved on the entablature inscription and capitals at some stage between the sixth century and the early eighth. The founder's monogram was also used in the middle of an altar panel surrounded by six other cruciform monograms—the latter encoding an invocation to Theotokos to help his servant Hyakinthos. This church

⁷⁴ Feld, 'Zu den Kapitellen'.

⁷⁵ Roueché, *Aphrodisias*, no. 103.

⁷⁶ Barnea, *Les monuments*, pp. 195–6, fig. 69.2a, who attributes that monogram to a known mid-fifth-century bishop John. But its cruciform type supports its dating to the middle or second half of the sixth century.

⁷⁷ Chalkia, 'La scultura', fig. 10.

⁷⁸ Arachne Database, no. 151048. Another example is the cruciform monogram in a medallion composed of letters *H*, *N*, *E*, *Ω*, and the genitive ending *-ου* (perhaps, *Νεωνου*) carved on a marble capital that has been found in the episcopal city Pergamon; see Arachne Database, no. 198383.

was a part of a larger monastic complex, and the monogram of the monastic founder thus visually communicated his authority to the monastic community.⁷⁹

The imperial tradition of monogrammatic display influenced not only Byzantine bishops and abbots but also ecclesiastical hierarchs who maintained active contact with the imperial capital. Cruciform monogrammatic signs of the Armenian *katholikos* Nerses III (641–61), carved in the Church of St Gregory the Illuminator in Zvart’nots, bear witness to the reception of this imperial tradition on the eastern borders of Byzantium. The monograms *NAPCOY* and *KAΘΟΛΙΚΟΥ* (Fig. 6.14a–b) adorned capitals in the church built as the *katholikos*’ place of residence and principal administrative centre.⁸⁰ The church thus functioned as his seat of authority, and Nerses’ monograms inside the building displayed that message quite clearly. Nerses’ monogrammatic signs present both his name and ecclesiastical title in the genitive, and the Church of Hagia Sophia must have been the main source of inspiration for such usage.

The Roman church of San Clemente provides an appropriate western parallel to the opulent churches of Justinian I and Theodora. Some of its chancel screens feature a box monogram of Pope John II, using the genitive form of his name in Latin, IOHANNIS, which visually resembles Justinian’s box monogram (Fig. 6.13). John’s graphic sign on the marble screens is framed by a triumphant wreath and



Fig. 6.13. Chancel screen in San Clemente, Rome. Norwegian Institute in Rome, H. P. L'Orange Photo Archive.

⁷⁹ Wulff, *Die Koimesiskirche*, pp. 186–93; Weigand, ‘Zur Monogrammschrift’; Mango, ‘Notes’, pp. 350–7, figs 3–5; Peschlow, ‘Neue Beobachtungen’; Brubaker and Haldon, *Byzantium*, p. 203.

⁸⁰ Kleinbauer, ‘Zvart’nots’, pp. 245–50; *The Armenian History Attributed to Sebeos*, chs 45 and 52, trans. Thomson, pp. 112 and 151. For more details on the church, cf. Marutian, *Arkhitekturnye pamiatniki*, pp. 8–48.

flanked by two Latin crosses, the latter highlighting the Christian essence of his papal authority. Before becoming pope, John (then called Mercurius) is known to have visited Constantinople in 523–6, when he was able to see the Church of St Polyeuktos for himself.⁸¹ Furthermore, the chancel screens at San Clemente were made of Proconnesian marble at a time when the Church of Sts Sergius and Bacchus had probably already been erected and when Hagia Sophia was under construction. The interiors of these three churches must therefore have provided inspiration for the marble screens that embellished the church in which Mercurius/John II served as presbyter prior to his pontificate.

Four columns with capitals showing the personal monogram of John II furnish additional evidence for this interpretation; the columns were brought from Rome to Lyons in the modern era and are now kept in the treasury of Lyons Cathedral. These, too, are made of Proconnesian marble, and were most likely produced alongside the chancel screens in a Constantinopolitan workshop. Such impressive carved marble objects may have been commissioned by the pope himself, or were perhaps even a gift from Emperor Justinian to Pope John II. Federico Guidobaldi suggests that the marble screens and columns travelled together, and the latter might have been used in San Clemente or another Roman church before they were relocated to the Church of Sts Cosmas and Damian, their known location in the sixteenth century.⁸²

The influence of Constantinopolitan carvers was even more noticeable in the North Adriatic, a region that remained in close contact with the Byzantine capital during the sixth century. Proconnesian capitals of the types previously carved for the churches of St Polyeuktos, Sts Sergius and Bacchus, and Hagia Sophia were used in San Vitale at Ravenna and in the Eufasian Basilica at Poreč (*Parentium*), suggesting either that Constantinopolitan carvers accompanied the raw marble to the region, or that the capitals were carved in the Byzantine East, and monograms were later added to their imposts in post-workshop production in Ravenna and Poreč.⁸³

Bishop Ecclesius (522–32) was responsible for the initial phase in the construction of San Vitale, and his efforts may have been inspired by the magnificent decorations of St Polyeuktos, which he possibly saw during his visit to Constantinople in 526. Although the church was consecrated by Bishop Maximian (546–57), major building activity most likely took place soon after the completion of Hagia Sophia during the pontificate of Bishop Victor (538–45).⁸⁴ Accordingly, the box monogram that encoded both his name and ecclesiastical title (*episcopus Victor*) and incorporated the sign of the cross in its upper field (Fig. 6.14c) was

⁸¹ Barsanti and Guidobaldi, 'Gli elementi'.

⁸² Guidobaldi, 'Origine'; Sodini, Barsanti, and Guidobaldi, 'La sculpture', p. 326.

⁸³ Harrison, *Excavations*, vol. 1, p. 415; Terry, 'The Sculpture', pp. 55–7; Russo, *Sculpture*, pp. 31–8; and Mauskopf Deliyannis, *Ravenna*, pp. 231–4. Moreover, similar mason's marks appear in the Eufasian Basilica, San Vitale, and Hagia Sophia: Terry and Maguire, *Dynamic Splendour*, pp. 59–60 and note 4.

⁸⁴ Andreescu-Treadgold and Treadgold, 'Procopius', p. 714; and Mauskopf Deliyannis, *Ravenna*, pp. 199–200 and 223–6.

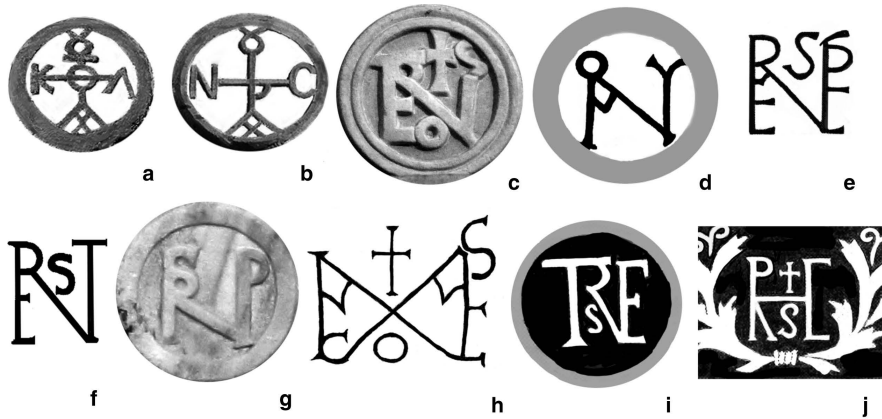


Fig. 6.14. Monumental monograms in churches: a–b) Zvar'nots; c–d) San Vitale, Ravenna; e) Eufasian Basilica, Poreč; f) Solin; g) Grado Baptistery; h) of Bishop Maximian from an impost fragment in Ravenna; i–j) Archiepiscopal Chapel, Ravenna.

carved on capital imposts in both the ground floor ambulatory and the gallery, approximately five to six metres above the floor level. Clearly, they were intended to visualize the episcopal authority of the local bishop to the church's attendants. The ninth-century historian Agnellus of Ravenna reported that a certain Julian the Banker (*argentarius*), probably of Greek origin, had donated an enormous sum of money (26,000 solidi) to the construction of San Vitale, and corroborated that statement by providing the dedicatory inscription that identified Julian as the church's main builder.⁸⁵ The lay donor's name in the Greek genitive, *IOYΛΙΑΝΟΥ*, was also encoded in the box monogram carved on two capital imposts on the gallery level of the southern side of the presbytery (Fig. 6.14d).⁸⁶ Julian's graphic sign, commemorating his status as principal sponsor of the church, is noteworthy for its obvious modelling after Justinian's monogram, and its position directly facing not the gallery but the main altar. Its location thus renders it invisible to lay attendants since, unlike the monogrammatic sign of Bishop Victor, it was primarily addressed to the divine Lord.

Constantinopolitan influence is also in evidence in the diverse column capitals erected in the Eufasian Basilica in the coastal Istrian town of Poreč, which served as a cathedral to local bishops in the mid-sixth century. The capitals surmount the columns separating the nave from the aisles, and the capital imposts face the nave, displaying the box monogram of Bishop Eufasius (Fig. 6.14e) and present the aisles with the sign of the cross. A medallion with the same episcopal monogram

⁸⁵ *Agnelli liber pontificalis ecclesiae Ravennatis*, 57–9, ed. Holder-Egger, pp. 318–19; Agnellus of Ravenna, *The Books of Pontiffs of the Church of Ravenna*, 57–9, trans. Mauskopf Deliyannis, pp. 171–2. For more detailed discussion of that banker, see Barnish, 'The Wealth', pp. 5–7; Cosentino, 'Banking', pp. 249–50.

⁸⁶ Deichmann, *Ravenna*, vol. 2.2, pp. 4 and 99, fig. 24; and Deichmann, *Frühchristliche Bauten*, fig. 307.

was carved above the central door at its west façade.⁸⁷ The graphic sign of the local bishop thus marks the path from the entrance to the nave, and signalled to its visitors who held authority in this sacred space from the moment of their arrival. It is very likely that Constantinopolitan innovations were brought to Poreč via Ravenna. Thus, as Yuri A. Marano has emphasized, liturgical spaces in the Eufasian Basilica were rearranged according to the Ravennate architectural model, and the apse and the synthronon of the presbytery became focal points. This architectural rearrangement rendered the episcopal church of Eufasius different from the traditional basilicas of the Adriatic type, instead highlighting the liturgical spaces that focused on the bishop.⁸⁸

Such architectural changes have been interpreted as indicative of growing episcopal power in both religious and civil matters.⁸⁹ Ultimately, as Gisela Cantino Wataghin puts it, 'the church as a building had an undoubtedly major role for the bishop in the process of asserting his authority'.⁹⁰ The public display of monumental monograms by early medieval bishops, exemplified in the churches of San Clemente and San Vitale as well as the Eufasian Basilica, thus became a new decorative tool that visualized their rising authority in Italian and Adriatic cities in the sixth century, at a time when the civil powers of ecclesiastic leaders were steadily increasing. For example, Bishop Victor's graphic sign of authority was carved in San Vitale around 540, contemporary with the expulsion of the Ostrogoths from Ravenna by Byzantine forces, an event that created a relative vacuum of civil power that the bishops could move in to occupy.

This newly developed mode of monumental expression of public authority appealed to other bishops in the North Adriatic after Justinian issued the *Pragmatic Sanction* for the former Ostrogothic territories in 554, confirming the bishops' status as administrative leaders in their communities.⁹¹ For instance, archaeological excavations in Salona (modern Solin), formerly the provincial capital in Roman Dalmatia, have shown that the local bishop Peter (554–62) had his box monogram PETRUS (Fig. 6.14f) carved onto capitals and on the architrave of a Christian basilica built during his pontificate.⁹² Episcopal monograms have been better preserved in the small northern Italian insular town of Grado, where the archbishops of Aquileia fled after a Lombard invasion in the 560s. The new seat required an immediate means to express visual symbols of archiepiscopal authority. Accordingly, the box monogram of Archbishop Probinus (569–71) was carved on the altar panel of Grado Baptistry (Fig. 6.14g), while the monogram of his successor, Elias (571–86), appeared in the adjacent Grado Cathedral that he consecrated in 579, also known as the Basilica of St Eufemia.⁹³ The presbytery in that church was

⁸⁷ Terry, 'The Sculpture', pp. 13–26 and 29–30; Russo, *Sculpture*, pp. 19–38.

⁸⁸ Marano, 'Domus', pp. 112–17 and 123.

⁸⁹ Cantino Wataghin, 'Fra tarda antichità', p. 351; Cantino Wataghin, 'Architecture'.

⁹⁰ Cantino Wataghin, 'Architecture', p. 302.

⁹¹ 'Provinciarum etiam iudices ab episcopis et primatibus uniuscuiusque regionis idoneos eligendos et sufficientes ad locorum administrationem ex ipsis videlicet iubemus fieri provinciis', *Constitutio pragmatica*, 12, ed. Schoell and Kroll, p. 800.

⁹² Gerber et al., *Die Bauten*, pp. 104–5 and figs 189–91.

⁹³ Forlati Tamaro et al., eds, *Da Aquileia*, pp. 277–89; Christie, *From Constantine*, pp. 175–6.



Fig. 6.15. Monogram of Bishop Elias on floor mosaic in the 'Mausoleum of St Eufemia', Grado Cathedral.

arranged in a similar manner to the Eufasian Basilica, and the importance of the bishop was further highlighted through its floor mosaics.⁹⁴ The box monogram HELIAS EPISCOPUS is currently visible on floor mosaics at the end of the nave closest to its presbytery, in the so-called Mausoleum of St Eufemia (Fig. 6.15), a small chapel located at the eastern end of its southern aisle, and in the *salutarium*, a small hall adjacent to the southern aisle of the church. In all these places, the episcopal monogram was placed at the centre of mosaic designs, and in some cases it was surrounded by the dedicatory medallions of well-to-do donors—a graphic arrangement that highlighted the elevated status of Aquileian archbishops in their new urban setting.

Grado Cathedral also demonstrates that the Constantinopolitan tradition of monumental monograms was not blindly copied in Italy, but was adjusted to local practices and conditions, especially when executed by local masters. Thus, a single box monogram consisting of the name and title of Bishop Maximian, *Episcopus Maximianus*, was carved locally on the impost fragment now located in the Archiepiscopal Museum in Ravenna (Fig. 6.14h). It derives originally either from a church of St Andrew, which Maximian is known to have restored and provided with columns of Proconnesian marble,⁹⁵ or from the church of St Stephen dedicated in 550 where, according to Agnellus, the capitals of all the columns featured

⁹⁴ Cantino Wataghin, 'Architecture', p. 293; and Marano, 'Domus', p. 123.

⁹⁵ Deichmann, *Ravenna*, vol. 2.2, p. 305 and fig. 173; Mauskopf Deliyannis, *Ravenna*, pp. 256–7. For the discussion of a similar monogram on the cathedra of Maximian, see Chapter 7.

the name of Maximian.⁹⁶ The monogram's design followed King Theoderic's and Bishop Victor's graphic devices in placing the sign of the cross at the top, but unlike these examples Maximian's monogram is incised on the plain surface of the impost block, which means that that marble impost arrived in Ravenna without a blank monogrammatic medallion.

As the example of the Basilica of St Eufemia demonstrates, when capitals with monogrammatic medallions were unavailable, mosaics could become an alternative medium for the public display of episcopal monograms in the North Adriatic. Two Ravennate monuments demonstrate that this medium could also be employed during the restoration of older ecclesiastical buildings. The first is the Neonian Baptistery, a late fourth-century octagonal building that Bishop Neon (c.450–73) rebuilt in the third quarter of the fifth century, and that Bishop Maximian redecorated before he assumed the title of archbishop some time before 553.⁹⁷ Mosaic *tituli* above its three absidioles were made during the latter renovation. Each quotes or paraphrases biblical verses, and all feature box monograms at their middle. One monogrammatic sign refers to the above fifth-century bishop—NEONE EPISCOPUS DEI *famulus* (Bishop Neon, servant of God) (Fig. 6.16a)—the other two present the name and title of the sixth-century restorer, EPISCOPUS (Fig. 6.16b) MAXIMIANUS (Fig. 6.16c).⁹⁸ Episcopal monograms are in this case thus inseparably intertwined with the words of the Holy Scripture.

Mosaics in the sixth-century Ravennate Archiepiscopal Chapel are even more symptomatic of the symbolic use of episcopal monograms in that northern Italian city (Fig. 6.17). The chapel was built in the episcopal palace complex, and Agnellus of Ravenna claimed that its construction started during the pontificate of Peter II (494–520). Most scholars have consequently interpreted a PETRUS monogram (Fig. 6.14i), visible above its apse, at the middle of the outer lunette, as a reference to that bishop.⁹⁹ The central part of the apse's inner lunette features another box monogram (Fig. 6.14j),¹⁰⁰ the meaning of which is less certain. Since it consists of letters A, R, C, H, I, P, and S, it probably conceals the title *archiepiscopus*. If this is the case, both monograms—located approximately five to six metres above the floor level—must refer to Archbishop Peter III (570–8), and indeed some scholars have attributed the construction of this chapel to the time of that Ravennate pontiff.¹⁰¹ Writing in the ninth century, it is not impossible that Agnellus might have confused the two late antique bishops. Alternatively, these monograms might have been added in the mid-sixth century, and it is salient to note that these two monograms are stylistically similar to the episcopal graphic signs on display in the Neonian Baptistery. Furthermore, Agnellus mentions that the chapel was

⁹⁶ Agnelli *liber pontificalis*, 72, ed. Holder-Egger, pp. 327–8; Agnellus of Ravenna, *The Books of Pontiffs*, 72, trans. Mauskopf Deliyannis, pp. 187–8.

⁹⁷ Mauskopf Deliyannis, *Ravenna*, pp. 88–95. On this baptistery as a representation of episcopal authority, see Wharton, 'Ritual'.

⁹⁸ Deichmann, *Ravenna*, vol. 1, pp. 130–1; and vol. 2.1, pp. 18–19; Deichmann, *Frühchristliche Bauten*, figs 177–9; Bovini, 'Note', pp. 116–29.

⁹⁹ For further details and references, see Mauskopf Deliyannis, *Ravenna*, pp. 188–96.

¹⁰⁰ Deichmann, *Frühchristliche Bauten*, fig. 219.

¹⁰¹ For more details and references, see Pasquini, *La decorazione*, pp. 38–9 and note 148.

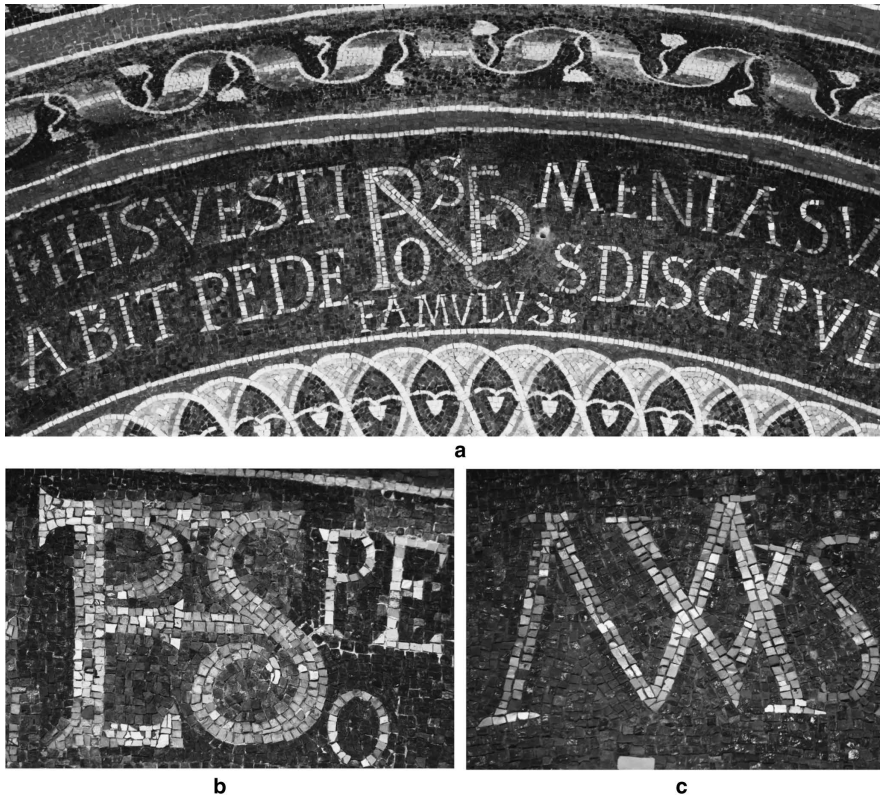


Fig. 6.16. Monumental episcopal monograms in the mosaics of the Neonian Baptistry, Ravenna: a) of Bishop Neon; b–c) of Bishop Maximian.

completed by Maximian,¹⁰² and it is therefore also possible that the two graphic signs were added during his pontificate, intended to provide historical legitimacy to his appropriation of archiepiscopal status.

The poetic inscription over the entrance to the chapel emphasizes the intimate link between the founder (*fundator*) of the chapel, Peter, and its true owner (*possessor*), Christ.¹⁰³ The incorporation of monogrammatic signs into the visual programme of that hall communicated the very same message. The medallion image of Christ appears between the monograms, while the title monogram is located between the Lord's figural image and his graphic representation in the form of a golden cross in a blue starry sky. In short, the monograms are embedded into the sacred visual and liturgical spaces of the chapel and directly face its entrance, so

¹⁰² *Agnelli liber pontificalis*, 72, ed. Holder-Egger, p. 328; Agnellus of Ravenna, *The Books of Pontiffs*, 75, trans. Mauskopf Deliyannis, p. 189.

¹⁰³ *Agnelli liber pontificalis*, 50, ed. Holder-Egger, p. 313; Agnellus of Ravenna, *The Books of Pontiffs*, 50, trans. Mauskopf Deliyannis, p. 162.



Fig. 6.17. Archiepiscopal Chapel, Ravenna. © Vanni Archive/Art Resource, NY.

that every visitor could easily recognize them and thus visualize episcopal authority in a state of inseparable unity with its transcendent sources.

The graphic signs in the Archiepiscopal Chapel thus illustrate the transformation that monumental monograms underwent in the course of the sixth century. Such epigraphic monograms originated as ennobling graphic devices that gave

monumental form to idiosyncratic honours, praising the donors and commissioners of late antique buildings, mainly churches. Yet very soon after, Byzantine rulers appropriated these carved graphic signs for the public display of their own imperial authority in churches built as sacred settings for symbolic rituals of power, namely in Sts Sergius and Bacchus and Hagia Sophia. In these churches, imperial monogrammatic devices appeared side by side with the sign of the cross, visualizing the elevated status of emperors above all men in their proximity to the Lord. Ecclesiastical hierarchs in various parts of the early Byzantine world adopted this application of monumental monograms, and used them to demarcate their holy headquarters. This practice of monumental display continued in the Byzantine East in the following centuries, albeit on a less ambitious scale. In the early medieval West, ecclesiastical centres that maintained close contacts with mid-sixth-century Constantinople appropriated the practice, such as at Rome and Ravenna. But as the Ravennate case studies demonstrate, in an Italian context the practice of monumental monograms could be applied to other media such as mosaics, and these signs were further developed to visualize the transcendent sources of episcopal authority. It is therefore not surprising that when monumental monograms were once again employed during an imperial *renovatio* in ninth-century Rome, those using them did so in a manner very similar to the Ravennate examples above.

PART III

GRAPHIC SIGNS OF AUTHORITY IN EARLY MEDIEVAL EUROPE

Monogrammatic Culture in Pre-Carolingian Europe

The early medieval kingdoms emerging in the former western provinces of the Roman empire inherited many late Roman sociocultural traits. Late antique monogrammatic culture was one of them. The tradition of demarcating lay and divine authority, as well as elevated status, using monograms persisted in sixth- and seventh-century Italy, Spain, and Gaul, and sustained contacts with early Byzantium greatly contributed to the longevity of the practice. Yet the sociocultural significance of this monogrammatic tradition and its application in various media had steadily changed with the gradual demise of late Roman institutions, the transformation of social elites and related high-status culture, and the development of a new visual language of authority in early medieval Europe. In this prolonged process of sociocultural metamorphosis, the sixth-century secular and spiritual governors of Western Europe had much more in common with their late Roman predecessors and early Byzantine contemporaries than with their successors: the early medieval kings and bishops of the eighth century.

7.1. MONOGRAMS AS ROYAL SIGNS OF AUTHORITY

The use of royal monograms on Ostrogothic, Vandalic, Burgundian, and Merovingian coinage in the first half of the sixth century highlighted the unbroken continuity of the late imperial graphic tradition in the rapidly changing political landscape of the Western Mediterranean, and thus legitimized the nascent office of early medieval kingship with the visual vocabulary of late antique political culture.¹ As stressed in previous chapters, personal monograms began to be seen in this period as symbolic graphic attributes of late Roman and early Byzantine dignitaries, such as consuls and praetorian prefects; *reges* ruling in Italy, North Africa, and Gaul no doubt perceived their status in the Mediterranean political hierarchy to be at least commensurate with those high-ranking imperial officials or even above them, right next to the Byzantine emperor.

This latter perspective was especially representative of the type of rulership that the Ostrogothic King Theoderic the Great (493–526) had established in Italy

¹ On the late Roman features of early medieval kingship in the West in this period, see Barnwell, *Emperor*.

in 493. As Jonathan Arnold has persuasively argued, the Italian realm under Theoderic's rule retained an emphatically Roman identity and, not unlike early Roman emperors, he was commonly called *princeps* and *dominus noster*. These titles were utilized in his official media,² for example on the so-called Senigallia gold medallion produced after the capture of Ravenna in 493, or as a commemorative issue later in his reign.³ As hinted at by the return of western imperial regalia from Constantinople to Ravenna in 497, the Byzantine court silently accepted Theoderic's quasi-imperial status as *princeps Romanus*.⁴ Hardly an outsider to the political culture of the late Roman empire and its elite, Theoderic spent the formative decade of his youth as a high-status hostage at the imperial court in Constantinople and later received the title of patrician. Made Eastern Roman *magister militum* at a young age, Theoderic was elevated to consulship in the East in 484.⁵ His political worldview did not change much after he moved to Italy. As a would-be western *princeps*, he appointed consuls in the West, and sought confirmation of his choice from the Byzantine emperors.⁶

In the political climate of Romanness cultivated in Theoderic's Italy, it is hardly surprising that his coinage continued the late Roman practice of employing the ruler's monogrammatic sign as the main reverse type on lower denominations of Ostrogothic coinage. Furthermore, Theoderic's personal box monogram—modelled after the late Roman calligraphic tradition—was frequently employed as a reverse type not only on copper-alloy coinage but also on silver coins issued in his name in Italian mints (Fig. 7.1a).⁷ The numismatic reform of Anastasius that introduced the non-monogrammatic follis and its fractions did not affect the design of Ostrogothic copper-alloy coins. In a similarly late Roman fashion, Theoderic had his monogrammatic sign placed on other material media that propagated his rulership and authority to Italian subjects (Fig. 6.3b).⁸

The monogrammatic reverse type was continued on the silver and bronze coinage of Theoderic's royal successors, first by his young grandson Athalaric (526–34) (Fig. 7.1b) under the regency of the latter's mother and Theoderic's daughter, Amalasuentha, thereafter by Theoderic's nephew Theodahad (534–6), and finally by the warring king Totila/Baduila (541–52).⁹ The first two rulers were brought up in the decisively late Roman culture of the Ravennate court, and recently one scholar has even dubbed Theodahad a 'Platonic king' for his passion for late antique philosophy and erudition in Latin literature.¹⁰ The late Roman use

² Arnold, *Theoderic*, pp. 61–91 and 203. See also Moorhead, *Theoderic*, pp. 39–51.

³ Metlich, *The Coinage*, pp. 15–16; MEC, pp. 19–26; Arnold, *Theoderic*, pp. 111–15.

⁴ For more details, see Arnold, *Theoderic*, pp. 46 and 70.

⁵ Jones, Martindale, and Morris, *The Prosopography*, vol. 2, pp. 1080–1; Arnold, *Theoderic*, pp. 144–55.

⁶ Arnold, *Theoderic*, pp. 86–7.

⁷ Hahn, *Moneta*, vol. 1, pp. 85–91, Tables 11–12; MEC, pp. 36–8; Metlich, *The Coinage*, nos. 44–8, 51–5, 64–5, and 79–80; Arslan, 'Dalla classicità', pp. 434–7.

⁸ On the use of Theoderic's monogram on marble capitals in Ravenna, see Chapter 6. On a royal monogrammatic seal attributed to this king, see Schramm, 'Brustbilder'. Cf. Berges, 'Das Monogramm'.

⁹ Metlich, *The Coinage*, nos. 56, 58, 60–1, 67, 88, 91, and 94; Arslan, 'Dalla classicità', pp. 440–9.

¹⁰ Vitiello, *Theodahad*.



Fig. 7.1. a) Reverse of a quarter-siliqua with Theodoric's monogram (Ravenna, 493–526), Oslo University, Museum of Cultural History; b) reverse of a half-siliqua with Athalaric's monogram, Princeton University Numismatic Collection, Department of Rare Books and Special Collections, Firestone Library; c) reverse of a Lombard gold coin with Perctarit's monogram, Oslo University, Museum of Cultural History.

of personal monograms on Ostrogothic coins was therefore as natural for them as it had been for their triumphant predecessor.

With the Ostrogothic realm turning into the supreme polity of the Western Mediterranean in the first third of the sixth century, Ostrogothic appropriation of the late Roman numismatic use of rulers' monograms appealed to neighbouring kings and their entourages in North Africa, Burgundy, south-eastern Gaul, and beyond. Thus, Theodoric's monogram was copied on the reverse of silver coins issued in the name of Emperor Anastasius at Sirmium in Pannonia. Since these coins are usually associated with the Gepids, rather than with the Ostrogoths,¹¹ the choice of graphic attributes on this coinage is the best evidence of the Ostrogothic king's perceived political power outside Italy. In the south, the ruler's monogram was noticeably absent on Vandalic coinage until the last Vandalic king Gelimer (530–4) had his royal box monogram placed as the main reverse type on copper coins issued in Carthage.¹² This numismatic change, appealing to the concurrent graphic symbology of rulership, should be seen in the context of the king's efforts to legitimize himself following the usurpation of the Vandalic throne against the established rules of royal succession.¹³ In the north, the Burgundian king Gundobad (473–516) had his box monogram made the main reverse type on silver and base-metal coins struck in Lyons, possibly from the 490s onwards.¹⁴

Furthermore, this Burgundian king, and later his successors Sigismund (516–24) and Gundomar II (524–32), sometimes had their personal monograms placed on the reverse of gold coins issued in the name of Anastasius and subsequent Byzantine emperors. But in these instances, the royal monogrammatic signs were used as

¹¹ Metlich, *The Coinage*, pp. 43–4.

¹² Hahn, *Moneta*, vol. 1, p. 95; MEC, pp. 22–3, nos. 28–30; Berndt and Steinacher, 'Minting', p. 262, no. 20.

¹³ Conant, *Staying Roman*, pp. 311–26.

¹⁴ MEC, pp. 75–7. The starting date for this monogrammatic coinage remains uncertain, and one cannot exclude the possibility that the earliest Burgundian coins with Gundobad's monogram were struck before Theodoric's monogrammed coinage.



Fig. 7.2. Solidus of Theoderic in the name of Emperor Anastasius with a monogrammatic mintmark on the reverse (Rome, 491–516). London, BrM, reg. no. 1867,0101.1014. © The Trustees of the British Museum.

mintmarks in the field of the coin, and such usage was strikingly similar to the occasional employment of Theoderic's monogram at the end of the reverse legend in his gold coinage (Fig. 7.2). The legality of this practice was slightly dubious, since some might have perceived it as indirect infringement on the exclusive imperial right to issue gold coins. At the same time, many would not see much difference between such royal graphic signs and the monogrammatic mintmarks composed of a few letters that encoded the name of the mint where the coins were struck. Mintmarks of this type also appeared on some contemporary gold coins issued in Theoderican Italy (Fig. 7.2), and similar mintmarks were struck on bronze coins issued in south-eastern Gaulic mints such as Arles and Lyons from the 340s to 370s.¹⁵

The Merovingian victorious king Theodebert I (534–48) of Metz is better known for using his full name in the title legend of his gold coins—an action that was in direct violation of the practice established in the first decades after the discontinuation of Western Roman emperorship, according to which gold coinage issued in the West featured the visual attributes and titulature of contemporary Byzantine emperors.¹⁶ After all, the Byzantine emperor was still perceived to be a supreme ruler in the political culture of the mid-sixth-century Mediterranean. In contrast to his gold coinage, Theodebert's coins of lower denominations were much more traditional. After conquering Burgundy and Provence in the 530s, he simply sustained the previous royal practice of placing numismatic monograms on copper-alloy coins issued in his name in these territories, most likely in Marseilles.¹⁷ His monogrammatic signs on these coins closely imitated the form of

¹⁵ Metlich, *The Coinage*, pp. 17 and 27, nos. 6–7, 16, 19–23, and 28; Bruck, *Die spätromische Kupfer Prägung*, p. 81.

¹⁶ Collins, 'Theodebert I', pp. 27–30; MEC, pp. 116–17; Jenks, 'Romanitas'.

¹⁷ Brenot, 'Monnaies', 185–6; MEC, pp. 115–16.

Ostrogothic royal box monograms and were similarly framed by a wreath. One may wonder whether this noticeable difference between Theodebert's gold and base-metal coinage was intentional and whether it was conditioned not only by the symbolic importance attributed to gold, but also by the different target audiences addressed by each type of currency: innovative gold coins were expected to circulate among elites in Gaul and beyond, including Constantinople, while more traditionalist copper-alloy coins were issued to satisfy the needs of more down-to-earth local consumers.

A real departure from Ostrogothic prototypes at this Provençal mint only took place on base-metal coins of King Theodebald (548–55), whose personal monogrammatic signs no longer imitated late Roman and Ostrogothic prototypes, but exhibited a particular graphic form (Fig. 7.3a) typical of monograms engraved on sixth- and seventh-century Merovingian signet-rings. The striking feature of this new Merovingian graphic type was a semicircular line, or a superscript/subscript letter, connecting the upper or lower ends of the two vertical bars forming a monogrammatic box. The resulting semi-closed shapes that often resemble houses with pointed or round roofs (sometimes upside down) arranged letters in a nearly circular manner, reminiscent of the description of a personal monogram that the Merovingian bishop Avitus of Vienne commissioned for himself on a signet-ring around the year 509: 'Let the sign of my monogram written in a circle be read as index of [my] name.'¹⁸ Another important graphic feature of Merovingian monograms saw the letter S cross its central diagonal line, which differentiated them from late Roman samples. In this latter type, S was commonly featured in the upper or lower field of the monogrammatic sign (Fig. 7.4).

The Lombard conquest of northern and central Italy is traditionally viewed as the cause of a drastic rupture with late Roman socio-political traditions and institutions in the various affected regions. Yet Lombard kings such as Agilulf (590–616), Adaloald (616–26), and Aripert I (653–61) occasionally imitated the Ostrogothic usage of royal box monograms as reverse types on their silver coins.¹⁹ This practice changed noticeably only in the second half of the seventh century, on



Fig. 7.3. a) Theodebald's numismatic monogram (548–55); b) design of the signet-ring of Bertildis (628–38); c) diplomatic monogram of Clovis II (654).

¹⁸ 'Signum monogrammatici mei per gyrum scripti nominis legatur indicio', Avitus Viennensis, *Epistolae*, 87 (78), ed. Peiper, p. 97.

¹⁹ Hahn, 'Anmerkungen'; Arslan, 'Moneta e forme', figs 43–5.

coins attributed to Godepert (661–2), Grimoald (662–71), and Perctarit (671–88) (Fig. 7.1c), when such reverse monograms incorporated both a personal name and title, *rex* ('king')—a practice also attested in the contemporary Byzantine world.²⁰ More importantly, the box monograms of these latter three kings appeared as a reverse type not only on silver coins but also on gold tremisses issued in their names. However, by the mid-seventh century, such an act would have hardly surprised contemporaries. After the failure of the Italian *reconquista* in the last third of the sixth century, Byzantine rulers were no longer able to claim gold coinage as their exclusive prerogative in the Western Mediterranean. Hence, royal and 'local' gold tremisses, void of any reference to the Byzantine emperors, began to be struck at Visigothic and Merovingian mints from the last quarter of the sixth century onwards. The Lombard kings' placement of personal box monograms on the reverse of their gold coins, a practice that differed little from the occasional usage of urban monograms on Visigothic and Merovingian tremisses, simply confirmed this geopolitical transformation by graphic means: in the political culture of the late sixth- and seventh-century Western Mediterranean, the legitimacy of the Byzantine emperor as the supreme ruler of the post-Roman world, and the symbolic claims associated with it, were no longer taken for granted.

Compared to sixth- and seventh-century Italy, the public visibility of royal monograms was rather limited in Merovingian Gaul outside Provence and, judging by surviving material evidence, was restricted to a few specific material symbols of royal authority, namely signet-rings and charters. Thus, as in other regions of the post-Roman world, local figures of authority—Merovingian kings and queens—had monograms engraved onto their gold signet-rings. One such example is found on a signet-ring discovered in Laon, on which the personal name of Queen Bertildis (628–38), a wife of King Dagobert I (623–34), is inscribed around the box monogram of her title *regina* (Fig. 7.3b).²¹ A similar example has been discovered in the sarcophagus of Queen Arnegunde, a wife of Chlothar I (511–61), buried at St Denis between 580 and 590. Like Bertildis' ring, the latter's signet-ring features the title monogram *regina* encircled with the queen's name in the genitive, ARNEGUNDIS.²² A final example is the ring attributed to King Clovis II (639–57), which might have originated in the sarcophagus of the deceased king at St Denis. The ring's two bezels feature box monograms, one of which has been decoded as S(ignum) REGIS and the other as presenting the royal name *Chlodoveus* in a distinctively Merovingian monogrammatic form.²³

The same king is known for the use of a different box monogram in his diplomas, which is demonstrated by the charter issued at Clichy on 22 June 654 where the royal monogram incorporating the royal title *rex* is employed in Clovis'

²⁰ MEC, pp. 63, 328–30; Arslan, 'Ritrovamenti'; Arslan, 'Il tremisse'; Arslan, 'Moneta e forme', figs 46–8. A similar box monogram incorporating the royal title *rex* appears on the gold-leaf cross found in a rich seventh-century Lombard grave in Monza. See Fuchs, *Die langobardischen Goldblattkreuze*, p. 47, no. 62, pl. 16.

²¹ Deloche, *Étude historique*, no. 186, pp. 203–5.

²² Paris, Musée du Louvre, M.A.N. 87432; Wilson, 'A Ring'; Fleury, 'Le monogramme'.

²³ Roosens and Geubel, 'Un anneau'.

subscription line (Fig. 7.3c).²⁴ As indicated by the box monogram of Chlothar II (584–629), similarly used to authenticate a royal charter produced at Étrépagne in June 625,²⁵ monogrammatic signing might have been an established royal practice, visible on Merovingian diplomas produced in the first half and the middle of the seventh century.²⁶ Although a capital H frames both Clovis' and Chlothar's diplomatic monograms, cursive is employed for other letters, which suggests that each monogrammatic graphic device was designed by scribes in a Merovingian royal chancery, in a practice that might have begun as early as the sixth century. This usage of royal monograms for signing simultaneously reflects the much broader employment of monograms on Merovingian signet-rings.

7.2. MONOGRAMS AS SIGNS OF SOCIAL STATUS AND EPISCOPAL AUTHORITY IN PRE-CAROLINGIAN EUROPE

The vast majority of personal monograms found on gold signet-rings represented Gallo-Roman aristocrats (Fig. 7.4), including Merovingian bishops such as the aforementioned Avitus, who, in the early sixth century, had his box monogram engraved on the bezel of his signet-ring. Avitus' ring was not exceptional in its design, and some monogrammed gold rings from sixth- and seventh-century Gaul probably encoded the names of other local ecclesiastical hierarchs.²⁷ By the early seventh century, rings had become luxurious material symbols of episcopal authority not just in Gaul, but in Visigothic Spain too.²⁸ Thus, Isidore of Seville, in his *Ecclesiastical Offices* written between 598 and 615, mentioned that a bishop expected to receive a ring during consecration 'as a sign (*signum*) of episcopal honour and the seal (*signaculum*) of mysteries',²⁹ while the Fourth Council of Toledo (633) affirmed that a reinstated bishop had to receive pontifical insignia including a ring before the altar.³⁰ So one can speculate that some gold Visigothic rings with box monograms might have belonged to bishops. In using personal monograms for sealing, Visigothic and Merovingian bishops were comparable to Byzantine ecclesiastical hierarchs who used personal cruciform monograms from as early as the sixth century.³¹

²⁴ ChLA, vol. 13, no. 558.

²⁵ ChLA, vol. 13, no. 552. See also the monogram of Chlothar II in his charter to St. Denis, ChLA, vol. 13, no. 550.

²⁶ Erben, *Die Kaiser- und Königsurkunden*, pp. 146–7; Atsma and Vezin, 'Graphische Elemente', pp. 323–4. On surviving Merovingian diplomas from the final third of the seventh century until the early eighth century, royal *subscripti* signs had already replaced royal monograms. See ChLA, vol. 13, nos. 565–68 and 570; vol. 14, nos. 577, 579, 588, 591, and 593.

²⁷ Deloche, *Étude historique*.

²⁸ Dalton, *Catalogue*, pp. xxxiv–xxxv; and Moore, *A Sacred Kingdom*, pp. 152–3.

²⁹ 'Datur et anulus propter signum pontificalis honoris vel signaculum secretorum', *Sancti Isidori episcopi hispalensis de ecclesiasticis officiis*, 2. 5. 12, ed. Lawson, p. 60. On dating, see Isidore of Seville, *De ecclesiasticis officiis*, 2. 5. 12, trans. Knoebel, p. 12.

³⁰ *Concilios visigóticos e hispano-romanos*, ed. Vive, p. 203.

³¹ For an episcopal lead seal attributed to the sixth century, see Metcalf, *Byzantine Seals*, p. 341, no. 413.



Fig. 7.4. Merovingian ring, seventh century. New York, MMA, acc. no. 17.191.93.

More certainly, monograms engraved on silver and gold sixth- and seventh-century signet-rings, as well as on other material objects emanating from Visigothic Spain, functioned as markers of status in local society.³² Such usage was most likely inspired by Byzantine influence that was stronger in Visigothic Spain than in Merovingian Gaul. This was due, in part, to the presence of the Byzantine province of *Spania* on the south-eastern Spanish littoral from the mid-sixth to the early seventh century,³³ as well as to the enduring contacts of Spain with the Byzantine world thereafter. Under the same impulse, cruciform monograms began to appear in seventh-century Spain, whereas this monogrammatic form had become popular in Byzantine North Africa even earlier. This is indicated not only by the appearance of cruciform imperial monograms on copper-alloy coins of Carthage after Justinian's reconquest of the mid-sixth century and the discovery of moulds for the production of small medallions with cruciform monograms in the city in the same decades,³⁴ but also by the finds of gold and base-metal signet-rings inscribed with cruciform monograms of the Byzantine type, which encoded their owners' names with Latin letters.³⁵ Signet-rings featuring such monograms were produced in other Latin-speaking areas in the Western Mediterranean. For instance, almost a thousand miles northwest of Carthage, a ring with a similarly shaped cruciform Latin monogram has been discovered in a seventh-century grave at Santa María de Hito, in Spanish Cantabria.³⁶

³² The Museo Arqueológico Nacional in Madrid owns at least two Visigothic signet-rings with box monograms: an earlier silver ring found at Brácan (Montefrío, inv. no. 62194) features a box monogram of the late Roman type, while a later gold ring discovered at Montejo de Tiermes (Soria, inv. no. 52507) is inscribed with a monogram of the Merovingian type. See also Balmaseda Muncharaz, 'Orfebrería epigrafiada', pp. 16 and 23.

³³ On these Byzantine areas and their gradual conquest by Visigothic kings ending in 621, see Wood, 'Defending Byzantine Spain'; and Martínez Jiménez and Moreno Narganes, '*Nunc autem*'.

³⁴ Eger, 'Byzantine Dress Accessories', pp. 137–8, note 48.

³⁵ Deloche, *Étude historique*, nos. 301–2. A cruciform monogram can also be seen on a gilded bronze belt strap-end unearthed in Hippo Regius and dated to the second quarter of the seventh century; see Tobias, 'Riemenzungen', pp. 159–60, fig. 9.

³⁶ Gutiérrez Cuenca and Hierro Gárate, 'Dos anillos', pp. 153–9. Another signet-ring with a cruciform monogram has been described by Reinhart, 'Los anillos', p. 174, no. 18.

A unique horse bit now at the Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, produced in seventh- or eighth-century Spain provides another example of Eastern influence. Its rich inlaid decoration includes identical cruciform monograms of the Byzantine style, which probably encoded the name of a noble rider (Fig. 7.5).³⁷ This artefact is a near parallel with a currently missing horse bit from Real Armería in Madrid, which displayed a similar monogram tentatively deciphered as the name of King Wittiza (694–710). Yet, in contrast to the latter artefact, the technical features of the New York horse bit suggest that its usage was limited to ceremonial purposes,³⁸ and its cruciform monograms probably played a special role in the pageantry of authority on such occasions. The addition of cruciform monograms on Visigothic ceremonial horse bits must have been inspired by the Helena legend on the finding of the True Cross. According to this story, which enjoyed popularity in the early medieval West, Helena discovered not only the Cross but also the nails by which Christ was crucified, and she re-fashioned them into a helmet and a horse bit for her victorious Christian son, Constantine the Great.³⁹



Fig. 7.5. Horse bit from Visigothic Spain. New York, MMA, acc. no. 47.100.24.

³⁷ Acc. no. 47.100.24.

³⁸ *Art of Medieval Spain*, pp. 68–9, no. 28.

³⁹ Drijvers, *Helena Augusta*, p. 105.

Visigothic Spain was also affected by the late Roman and early Byzantine practice of engraving monograms on dress accessories. Thus, two Hispano-Visigothic belt buckles display similarities with early Byzantine examples in that one features a Latin box monogram on its tongue,⁴⁰ and the other displays on its plate a bar Latin monogram of the type that had been gaining popularity in the seventh-century Mediterranean.⁴¹

Eastern influence in Visigothic Spain was exemplified not only by the use of cruciform monograms on accessories that functioned as social extensions of the human body, but also by the appearance of such graphic devices on public monuments—a widespread practice in the sixth- and seventh-century Byzantine world. Thus, a cruciform personal monogram of the powerful Visigothic magnate Teodemir was carved on a roundel unearthed in the remains of his richly decorated residential complex at Pla de Nadal, near Valencia (Fig. 7.6a).⁴² Additionally, an external wall of the church of Santa María de Lara at Quintanilla de las Viñas, near the northern Spanish town of Burgos, features a frieze with three discs framing Latin cruciform monograms. The monograms were carved in the late Visigothic period, and probably encoded the name of a local noble donor or an invocation (Fig. 7.6b).⁴³ The closest surviving graphic parallels can be found in the Byzantine East. In 558, a local governor Thomas placed his cruciform monograms on doorways and capitals of the fortress at Androna (al-Anderin) in Syria, paired with chi-rhos, the sign of the cross, and a cruciform monogram with the Christian acclamation $\Phi\Omega\Xi-Z\Omega H$ ('Light-Life').⁴⁴ An even closer parallel can be found at Tower 40 of the Land Wall of Constantinople, where three similar discs with Greek cruciform monograms were carved onto the marble surface (Fig. 7.6c). The accompanying inscription dates these monograms to 685; they conceal a popular invocation pleading for the divine protection of Emperor Justinian II: 'O, Mother of God, help Lord Justinian' ($\Theta\epsilon\omicron\tau\acute{o}\kappa\epsilon\ \beta\omicron\eta\theta\epsilon\iota\ \Upsilon\omicron\upsilon\sigma\tau\iota\upsilon\alpha\iota\omicron\nu\omicron\upsilon\ \delta\epsilon\sigma\pi\acute{o}\tau\omicron\upsilon$).⁴⁵

More evidence for the use of monograms to articulate social status emanates from sixth- and seventh-century Italy, especially from Ravenna and other areas that maintained intimate contacts with the Byzantine world. As shown in the previous chapter, this tendency, amongst other things, resulted in the employment of monumental monograms in ecclesiastical settings as visual symbols of episcopal authority. One can envision a similar symbolic context for the monogram that appears on ivory plaques embellishing the *cathedrae* of Maximian of Ravenna (546–57), who, despite his humble origins in the Istrian city of Pola, was elevated

⁴⁰ Ripoll, 'Problemas cronológicos', p. 70; Tejado Sebastián, 'Castros militares', pp. 155–6.

⁴¹ London, BrM, reg. no. 1992,0605.2; Ager, 'Byzantine Influences', p. 75, fig. 15.

⁴² Juan Navarro and Pastor Cubillo, 'Los visigodos'; Chavarría Arnau, 'Churches', p. 172.

⁴³ Barroso Cabrera and Morín de Pablos, 'Fórmulas y temas', pp. 298–9; Domingo, *Capiteles*, vol. 1, pp. 298–9.

⁴⁴ Eastmond, 'Monograms', pp. 228–9 and fig. 11.4. On the $Z\Omega H-\Phi\Omega\Xi$ monogram, see section 7.3.

⁴⁵ Arachne Database, no. 144795; Meyer-Plath and Schneider, *Die Landmauer*, p. 130, no. 26; Asutay-Effenberger, *Die Landmauer*, p. 174, fig. 199. Six similarly carved medallions with cruciform monograms were also recorded for Tower 46, and dated to the same period. See van Millingen, *Byzantine Constantinople*, p. 100; Asutay-Effenberger, *Die Landmauer*, p. 174.

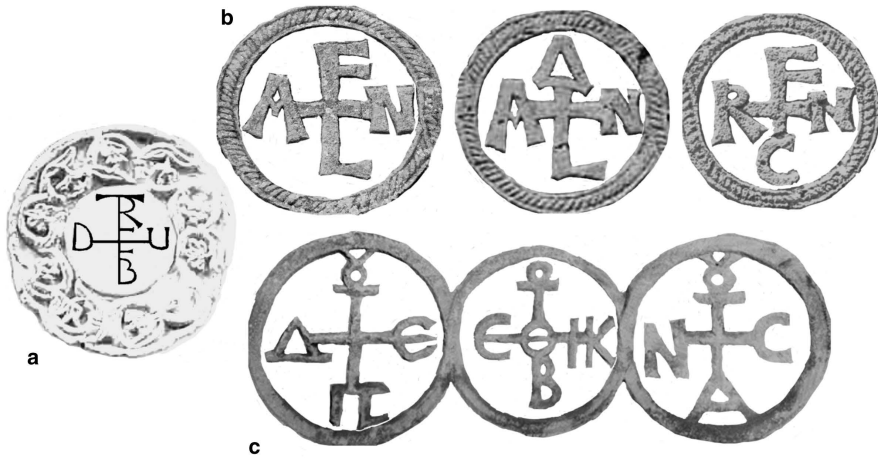


Fig. 7.6. a) Theodemir's monumental monogram from Pla de Nadal; b) monumental monograms from Santa María de Lara at Quintanilla de las Viñas; c) monumental monograms of Justinian II from the Land Wall of Constantinople.

to the Ravennate see after the Justinianic reconquest of this imperial city. The exquisite throne, designed for use in a cathedral setting, was most likely produced in the Byzantine East.⁴⁶ Under the influence of the contemporary monogrammatic fashion, an elaborate Latin box monogram of a local Ravennate type, MAXIMIANI EPISCOPI ('of Bishop Maximian'), was carved on its frontal side to face its public audiences (Fig. 7.7). The monogram is placed above the figures of the four evangelists and John the Baptist, and is adorned by two peacocks (symbols of immortality) on its sides, reminiscent of decorations in contemporary Christian plastic arts and manuscript culture where two birds flank a symbol of Christ such as a chi-rho, ankh-cross, or Latin cross. In a similar vein, the monogram incorporating Maximian's title functioned as a graphic symbol of his episcopal authority and ensured the bishop's perpetual symbolic presence in his church.

This habit of marking episcopal headquarters with episcopal monograms affected not only plastic arts but also the appearance of some contemporary material objects produced in the Byzantine world for public use within ecclesiastical spaces, such as the polycandela (oil lamp chandeliers) preserved in the Kumluca or Sion Treasure. The treasure contains ecclesiastical silver objects that a Lycian bishop named Eutybios probably donated to the monastery of Holy Sion near Myra in the mid-sixth century, including polycandela that feature two forms of his personal monogram in the genitive: *EYTYXIANOY EPIΣKOΠΟΥ* ('of Bishop Eutybianos'). Some of these silver chandeliers employ his cruciform monogram as an independent visual symbol, while others frame the box monogram of the donor with a circular inscription—intended to be read together as intercessory messages

⁴⁶ For more details and references, see Volbach, *Avori*, pp. 38–40; Rizzardi, 'La cattedra'; Mauskopf Deliyannis, *Ravenna*, pp. 213–18.



Fig. 7.7. Lower frontal part of Maximian's throne, Ravenna. Norwegian Institute in Rome, H. P. L'Orange Photo Archive.

on behalf of the bishop: *ΑΓΙΑ ΣΙΩΝ ΒΟΗΘΙ* monogram ('O, Holy Sion, help Bishop Eutychianos') and *ΤΡΙΣΑΓΙΕ Κ(ΥΠΙ)Ε ΒΟΗΘΙ* monogram ('O, Thrice-holy Lord, help Bishop Eutychianos').⁴⁷ The use of both box and cruciform monograms corresponds well with the polycandela's time of production revealed by its silver stamps, c.550–60,⁴⁸ making it a close contemporary of Maximian's *cathedra*. The church settings for which such polycandela were intended probably helped to increase the perceived intercessory power of these invocations, as the episcopal graphic signs of authority were revealed to viewers standing below by the shimmering light of candles, creating a special visual effect for onlookers.

Such usage of monograms was not restricted to luxury silver objects, and they were applied to more quotidian copper-alloy polycandela. For instance, a Syrian polycandelon from the British Museum, dated to the second half of the sixth or first half of the seventh century, features a central disc with a cruciform monogram that can be deciphered as either *ΑΝΑΣΤΑΣΙΟΥ* ('of Anastasios') or *ΙΟΥΣΤΙΝΙΑΝΟΥ* ('of Justinian') (Fig. 7.8).⁴⁹ The location and size of the monogram clearly indicate

⁴⁷ On these objects, inscriptions, and monograms, see Boyd, 'A "Metropolitan" Treasure', p. 10 and nos. 25–36; Ševčenko, 'The Sion Treasure', pp. 44–7. See also ICA, nos. 179193, 179196, and 179197.

⁴⁸ Dodd, 'The Question of Workshop'.

⁴⁹ Buckton, ed., *Byzantium*, pp. 106–7, no. 116.



Fig. 7.8. Early Byzantine copper-alloy polycandelon. London, BrM, reg. no. 1994,0610.11. © The Trustees of the British Museum.

that it was incorporated into the chandelier for the purpose of its public display. As this copper-alloy polycandelon illustrates, the practice of inscribing luxury interior objects with the monograms of high dignitaries was adapted for cheaper base-metal objects, in the same manner as these changes occurred on contemporary dress accessories and jewellery.

Monogrammed objects in the sixth-century post-Roman world most likely had a much greater public visibility than that implied by the small handful of surviving samples. A passage in Agnellus of Ravenna's *Liber pontificalis*, describing his city at the end of the Gothic war in 561, allows a glimpse of that lost visual world, saturated with graphic signs and monogrammatic devices: 'And in that time there were

many signs and prodigies around Ravenna, so that many “signed” (*signarent*) their things (*res suas*) and homes and vessels, so that they might be recognized.⁵⁰ This is a puzzling statement. Did he mean that numerous omens were interpreted in Ravenna as signs of its imminent destruction by an invading force or natural disaster? If he did, where did he receive this information from, and why would the Ravennate people engage in such a ‘signing’ frenzy during the turbulent sixth century, unheard of in other Mediterranean cities? The more likely explanation is, however, that, writing in the ninth century, Agnellus simply attempted to rationalize the sixth-century monogrammatic culture of Ravenna, the remnants of which he could still observe on monuments and ‘antique’ objects, without a real understanding of their sixth-century context. The ‘signing’ that Agnellus describes in his text must have referred to monumental monograms carved in mid-sixth-century Ravenna, as well as to monogrammatic devices of the kind seen on the polycandela from the Sion Treasure.⁵¹

The sixth- and seventh-century finds in the Crypta Balbi in Rome provide other examples of such ‘signed’ objects. The most spectacular is a bronze suspended lamp in the form of Pegasus, dated to the late sixth century or first half of the seventh. Three box monograms are engraved on the body of Pegasus along with an abbreviation SCI (Fig. 7.9a), plausibly deciphered as *Monasteri Sancti Martini Turensis* (‘of the Monastery of St Martin of Tours’), and thus connecting the lamp with the Roman church of Santi Silvestro e Martino ai Monti.⁵² Another monogrammed object from Crypta Balbi is a small lead square plaque featuring a box monogram, which identified an object it was attached to as either ‘of St Lawrence’ or ‘of St Peter’.⁵³ The final example is a monogrammed circular glass ‘blob’ that used to be attached to the wall of a vessel, with a box monogram possibly identifying it as property of the nearby monastery of San Lorenzo in *Pallacinis*. This practice was hardly unique, as evinced by the existence of similar glass ‘blobs’ with monograms in the Vatican Museum,⁵⁴ and artefacts of this kind most likely left quite an impression on Agnellus, prompting him to mention ‘signed’ vessels in the ninth century.

Monogrammatic culture was not limited to the Ravennate exarchate and Rome, but also impacted upon Lombard territories, as shown by the finds of gold-leaf crosses in seventh-century Lombard graves at Monza, Trezzo sull’Adda, Piacenza, and Toscana—with monograms engraved at their central medallions.⁵⁵ The same

⁵⁰ ‘Et in ipso tempore multa signa et prodigia facta sunt circa Ravennam, ita ut multi signarent res suas et domos et vasa, ut agnoscerentur’, Agnelli *Liber pontificalis ecclesiae Ravennatis*, 79, ed. Holder-Egger, pp. 265–391, at p. 331. *The Book of Pontiffs of the Church of Ravenna*, 79, trans. Mauskopf Deliyannis, p. 193.

⁵¹ One can add here a sixth-century Byzantine marble font from the Museum of Torcello in Venice with a complex cruciform monogram, which also features an alpha and omega beneath its horizontal arms. This museum item came from the perished church of Santi Marco e Andrea on Murano. All attempts to decode this graphic device remain inconclusive. See Polacco, *Sculture*, pp. 32–3.

⁵² Arena et al., eds, *Roma dall’antichità*, pp. 430–2, no. II.5.8.

⁵³ Arena et al., eds, *Roma dall’antichità*, p. 369, no. II.4.553.

⁵⁴ Arena et al., eds, *Roma dall’antichità*, p. 318, no. II.3.393; Fremersdorf, *Antikes, islamisches und mittellaterliches Glas*, p. 72, nos. 703–5.

⁵⁵ Fuchs, *Die langobardischen Goldblattkreuze*, nos. 62–4, 107, and 109, pls. 15, 16, and 31; Roffia and Sesino, ‘La necropoli’, pp. 37–8, no. 8.

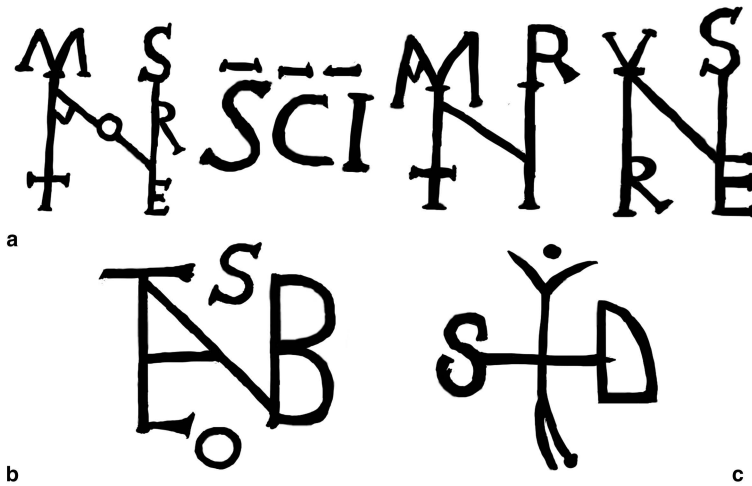


Fig. 7.9. Monograms on early medieval objects from Italy: a) on the 'Pegasus' lamp from Crypta Balbi, Rome; b) on the strap-end from Castel Trosino, grave 126; c) on the strap-end from Castel Trosino, grave 9.

conclusion can be drawn from the dissemination pattern of monogrammed strap-ends in the Mediterranean world from the late sixth century until the end of the seventh century (more than two dozen specimens are known).⁵⁶ This peculiar material tradition seems to have originated in Italy and Dalmatia, probably evolving from the earlier usage of box monograms on belt buckles, and then spread to the Eastern Mediterranean and North Africa. While silver was the default metal for strap-ends in Italy, those embellished with cruciform personal Greek monograms and produced in the seventh-century Byzantine territories were similar to contemporary Byzantine belt buckles, in that they were made of gold and gilded copper-alloy.⁵⁷

As with the early development of monogrammed belt buckles, the practice of adding monograms to strap-ends was probably connected to high-ranking members of the military. Such a connection is bolstered by the evidence of silver strap-ends carved with box and cruciform monograms—some of which probably encode Latin names—that have been found in Italy in rich warrior graves, such as Grave 126 in the 'Lombard' cemetery at Castel Trosino in Emilia Romana, dated to the first quarter of the seventh century and featuring a strap-end with a box monogram of a standard late Roman type (Fig. 7.9b).⁵⁸ In contrast, strap-ends deposited at later burials in this cemetery—such as those in Graves 9, 90, and T—demonstrate the transition to a cruciform monogrammatic type popular in

⁵⁶ These strap-ends were part of the multipartite belts, which appeared during the reign of Justinian I. For further details, see Schulze-Dörrlamm, *Byzantinische Gürtelschellen*, vol. 2, pp. 286–93; and Eger, 'Between Amuletic Ornament', p. 286.

⁵⁷ Tobias, 'Riemenzungen', pp. 159–70.

⁵⁸ Tobias, 'Riemenzungen', pp. 152–9; Paroli, ed., *La necropoli*, p. 170.



Fig. 7.10. Copper-alloy belt buckle from Visigothic Spain, seventh century. New York, MMA, acc. no. 66.152.2.

contemporary Byzantium. Grave 90 has been tentatively described as the burial of a local leader, who has even been identified as a certain Anso (a typical Lombard name) based on three buttons discovered there. But the cruciform monogram on the strap-end from this burial consists of the letters of a different name (G, U, I, L, M)—perhaps the genitive form of *Guilimus*—which in turn begs the question whether the monogram identified the deceased leader or another individual.⁵⁹ It is possible, for instance, that the belt was handed over from its original owner to its final wearer, and that the latter simply perceived the cruciform monogram on its strap-end to be an appropriate graphic symbol of social prestige. A similar transformation from a personal monogram to an undecipherable visual status symbol can be observed on the strap-end from Grave 9, on which a cruciform graphic device accompanies a figural image of a warrior holding a shield (Fig. 7.9c). Werner Seibt has tentatively decoded this monogrammatic sign as DULIS,⁶⁰ but most of the characters at the ends of its cruciform arms deviate from the traditional forms of the letters D, U and L, to the extent that one may wonder whether or not the linguistic content of that sign bore any meaning for the producer and wearer of the strap-end. For many users of lower status, such monograms remained undecipherable visual signs of social prestige, as can be corroborated by a contemporaneous copper-alloy belt buckle from Visigothic Spain, on which gilding and an ornamental sign imitating a cruciform monogram were of equal importance in visualizing the social pretensions of its wearer (Fig. 7.10).⁶¹

The persistent use of personal monograms as graphic signs of social status in the sixth- and seventh-century Latin West also contributed to the appearance of monogrammatic signs referring to larger communities, such as numismatic urban monograms. The first such graphic sign appeared on the so-called ‘municipal’ copper coinage of the Ostrogothic kingdom, although Ostrogothic kings might have been the only authority behind such issues. While most of these coins featured the

⁵⁹ Tobias, ‘Riemenzungen’, p. 156, Fig. 2.7; Paroli, ed., *La necropoli*, p. 216.

⁶⁰ Tobias, ‘Riemenzungen’, pp. 154–5.

⁶¹ The place of the belt buckle’s production remains a matter of debate. For an argument in favour of its Eastern Mediterranean origin, see Ripoll López, ‘A Belt Fitting’.



Fig. 7.11. a) Ostrogothic copper coin with the monogram of Ravenna, Oslo University, Museum of Cultural History; b) the reverse of a Merovingian silver coin from Clermont with the urban monogram *ARV[ernum]*, Princeton University Numismatic Collection, Department of Rare Books and Special Collections, Firestone Library.

personification of Rome and traditional Roman imagery such as an eagle or she-wolf, the largest group of decanummi (10 nummi) displayed the personification of Ravenna and the title legend *FELIX RAVENNA* ('happy Ravenna') on their obverse, and the city's box monogram on their reverse (Fig. 7.11a). The exact details of their production remain a matter of debate amongst numismatists. They were produced either in Ravenna or Rome, or perhaps in both, in the period ranging from the 500s to 530s.⁶² Like the placement of numismatic royal monograms, the urban monogram of Ravenna was situated inside a wreath on the reverse. Due to its short history, Ravenna lacked a developed repertoire of representative symbols, and the urban monogram was thus invented as a new visual symbol of authority appropriate to its status in the fifth and sixth centuries as a node of imperial and royal power.

This Ravennate innovation complemented the earlier tradition of figural personifications of imperial capitals, which were actively used from the Constantinian period onwards as religiously correct substitutes for the images of pagan deities.⁶³ In the post-Roman world, it apparently became unproblematic to provide such cities outside the grip of direct imperial control not only with figural personifications but also with their own graphic devices.⁶⁴ Hence, the cruciform monogram of Rome was later displayed on papal-Byzantine silver coins struck in the eternal city at the turn of the eighth century.⁶⁵ From the late sixth century onwards, some less prominent Italian cities such as Lucca and perhaps Luni appropriated the newly invented tradition of urban monograms for their coins,⁶⁶ and this numismatic practice also affected mints in Visigothic Spain and Merovingian Gaul.

⁶² MEC, pp. 32–3; Metlich, *The Coinage*, pp. 48–50, nos. 78a–b.

⁶³ Bruhn, *Coins and Costume*, p. 21.

⁶⁴ It is hardly surprising in this regard that the only other mint in the post-Roman world which placed an urban monogram on its bronze coins (pentanummi) during the reign of Justinian I was a city on the north-eastern fringes of the Byzantine Empire, Cherson. See CBC, vol. 1, no. 108.

⁶⁵ O'Hara, 'A Find', nos. 1–7 and 21.

⁶⁶ MEC, no. 318; Arslan, 'La "prima generazione"', p. 257, fig. 42; Arslan, 'Monete longobarde', p. 326.

Thus, during the joint reigns of Chindasvinth and Reccesvinth (649–53) and of Egica and Wittiza (694/5–702), cruciform Latin monograms of Spanish cities became the default reverse type for gold tremisses.⁶⁷ This Visigothic practice was purely pragmatic: the need to place the titles and names of two rulers on both sides of such coins left no option but to express the mint name with a reverse monogrammatic type. At the same time, the fact that die-engravers consistently employed monograms to encode the names of cities where the mints were located, rather than the names of Visigothic kings themselves, suggests that, by the second half of the seventh century, such graphic devices were already perceived to be less appropriate as symbols of royal authority, a trend that corresponded to the decreasing popularity of imperial monograms in seventh-century Byzantium. Rather, they were seen to function more appropriately as graphic signs representing people of an elevated status, or distinct communities such as episcopal cities. This trend became more apparent on Merovingian coinage from the late sixth to the first half of the eighth century, due to the absence of effective royal control over local mints. As a result, some gold and (later) silver Merovingian coins featured the monogrammatic signs of local figures of authority, cities, or monasteries controlling the mints (Fig. 7.11b).⁶⁸ As in the case of the Roman evidence from the *Crypta Balbi* discussed above, monastic monograms usually encoded the names of the holy patrons with which such communities identified themselves.

The appearance of urban and monastic monograms in the Latin West became a noticeable deviation from the late Roman calligraphic tradition of personal and acclamatory monogrammatic signs. These new graphic signs instead represented discrete collective entities, namely episcopal cities and monasteries, that had gradually acquired a special role in the political landscape of Western Europe after the disintegration of the Western Roman empire.

7.3. INVOCATIONAL GRAPHIC DEVICES IN PRE-CAROLINGIAN MATERIAL AND MANUSCRIPT CULTURE

Invocational cruciform monograms, wishing well and begging for divine help and support, represent another new graphic development, especially typical of the early Byzantine East. Along with the introduction of the cruciform personal monograms in the second quarter of the sixth century, the appearance of such graphic devices reflected the ubiquitous presence of the sign of the cross in the post-Roman world, as well as to the general belief in the sign's apotropaic power.

Textual well-wishing and intercessory invocations—such as *Zωή* (life), *Υγεία* (health), *Vivas* (may you live)—became extremely popular in the late antique

⁶⁷ Miles, *The Coinage*, pp. 348–50 and 406–30; Vico Monteoliva, Cores Gomendio, and Cores Uria, *Corpus*, pp. 465–8, 473, and 525–51; MEC, p. 51.

⁶⁸ For further details and references, see Garipzanov, 'Metamorphoses', pp. 429 and 432, nos. 4–8 and 19–35.

world among a range of religious communities. Invocations of this kind were engraved on various stamps and functioned somewhat similarly to amulets and charms when applied to different quotidian objects, most notably bread.⁶⁹ In Christian usage, such invocations were often placed on cross-shaped stamps; the most powerful Christian sign was thus perceived to augment the intercessory properties of the words themselves. For the very same reason, in the period from the fifth to seventh centuries, some invocations began to be expressed first with cruciform acrostics and later with proper cruciform monograms.

Angelos Chaniotis describes an earlier graphic example of such Christian appropriation, scratched onto a wall in late antique Aphrodisias at the time of on-going religious competition. On that graffito, the first seven letters of the Greek alphabet are arranged in the form of the cross; a zeta and eta provide the latter with horizontal arms (Fig. 7.12). The cursive beta lying on its side in between these two letters resembles an omega, thus producing the aforementioned word *ZΩH* (life) encoded in this cruciform abecedary, and thereby deciphering the symbolic meaning of the cross to the Christian believers.⁷⁰



Fig. 7.12. Early graffito from late antique Aphrodisias. Photo by Angelos Chaniotis.

⁶⁹ For more details on such stamps, see Galavaris, *Bread*; Weitzmann, ed., *The Age of Spirituality*, pp. 627–8, no. 565; and Caseau, 'Magical Protection'.

⁷⁰ Chaniotis, 'Studying Graffiti'.



Fig. 7.13. Early Byzantine gold pendant with the $\Phi\Omega\Sigma$ - $Z\Omega H$ monogram. New York, MMA, acc. no. 17.190.1660.

A more developed form of cruciform graphic device in the Greek East consisted of the word $Z\Omega H$ in combination with $\Phi\Omega\Sigma$ (light), which jointly refer to divine attributes mentioned in John 1.4 ('In him was life; and the life was the light of men') and the promise of salvation made by Jesus to his followers in John 8.12 ('I am the light of the world: he that followeth me shall not walk in darkness, but shall have the light of life'). In the 'Light-Life' graphic device, the two words inter-cross and share the omega as their middle letter (Fig. 7.13). In some cases, the remaining four letters were attached to the four arms of the cross with an omega at its centre. This popular device can also be seen as a Christian visual alternative to the Jewish symbol of light and life, menorah or seven-branched candelabrium, which was earlier etched in catacombs and other settings.⁷¹ The $\Phi\Omega\Sigma$ - $Z\Omega H$ device appeared on various early Byzantine material artefacts such as lamps,⁷² rings,⁷³

⁷¹ Longenecker, "Good Luck", pp. 260–1.

⁷² Bouras and Parani, *Lighting*, pp. 26–7.

⁷³ e.g. on a sixth-century silver ring from Royal Ontario Museum, no. 986.181.12, described by Dauterman Maguire, Maguire, and Duncan-Flowers, *Art and Holy Powers*, no. 86. See also ICA, no. 128807.



Fig. 7.14. a) *Ora pro me* device from St Petersburg, National Library of Russia, Lat.Q.v.I.3, fol. 192r; b) *Ora pro me* device from Würzburg, UB, M.p.th.f.68, fol. 170v; c) *Amen* device from Wolfenbüttel, HAB, Cod. Guelf. 64 Weiss, fol. 67v; d) *Θεοτόκε βοήθει* monogram on the strap-end from Mersin, Cilicia; e) *Θεοτόκε βοήθει τῷ σῶ δούλῳ* device from early Byzantine seals; f) *ΜΙΧΑΗΛ* monogrammatic tattoo on a mummified body from et-Tereif, Sudan; g) *Η ΑΓΙΑ ΜΑΡΙΑ* monograms on icons from Mount Sinai.

cross-pendants,⁷⁴ processional crosses,⁷⁵ textiles,⁷⁶ belt buckles,⁷⁷ and sepulchral crosses⁷⁸ found in different parts of the Mediterranean world. The popularity of this graphic sign of Christian authority stretched beyond the core Byzantine areas and reached as far as southern Spain in the west and Nubia in the south.

In the same period, a cruciform graphic device addressing Christian readers, *ora pro me* ('pray for me'), entered late antique Latin manuscript culture—the first word creating a horizontal line with the next two words crossing it downward vertically and sharing the letter R. Clerical scribes employed such cruciform exhortation at the end of their work, often followed by their personal name. The cruciform shape thus empowered a scribe's request for a prayer on his behalf. The earliest occurrence of this graphic device can be found in the early fifth-century manuscript with Augustine of Hippo's works written in North Africa (Fig. 7.14a), a manuscript that some scholars have even attributed to the quill of the author himself. Its concluding line encourages its reader to *lege et ora pro me peccatore*

⁷⁴ e.g. on a seventh-century gold pectoral cross found in Kerch, currently in BrM, reg. no. 1923,0716.66, and described by Dalton, 'A Gold Pectoral Cross'.

⁷⁵ ICA, no. 162518, from Paris, BnF, Cabinet des Médailles. It accompanies an invocation to St George; see Walter, *The Warrior Saints*, pp. 124 and 271, fig. 21.

⁷⁶ e.g. on a fifth- or sixth-century Coptic textile from Antinoë, currently in the Brooklyn Museum, acc. no. 15.440, described in Cooney, *Late Egyptian and Coptic Art*, pl. 46; and at the middle of a sixth- or seventh-century liturgical cloth from the Treasury of Monza with the cruciform Greek monograms of the evangelists in the four corners, described by Merati, *Il tesoro*, pp. 8–9. All the monograms are embroidered in red silk on linen cloth. For more details, see ICA, no. 70866.

⁷⁷ e.g. a belt buckle from the Schmidt collection with a provenance from southern Spain, described in Wamser, ed., *Die Welt von Byzanz*, p. 281, no. 449.

⁷⁸ Tsakos, 'Sepulchral Crosses', pp. 165–8.

Augustinus ('Read and pray for the sinner that I am, Augustine').⁷⁹ Although the name of Augustine could have been added to this phrase at a later stage, Augustine's praise of the sign of the cross mentioned earlier in this book makes the idea that he was directly involved in the creation of this graphic device all the more plausible. The *ora pro me* cruciform formula was occasionally used in early medieval Latin manuscripts and can, for example, be seen in a gospel-book produced in southern Italy in the second half of the sixth century (Fig. 7.14b).⁸⁰

In the same centuries, the most popular liturgical word *Amen* also attracted the attention of Christian calligraphers. This Greek word (*AMHN*) is possibly encoded by the cruciform monogram on two silver shallow dishes from the Lampsakos Treasure, produced in the early seventh century.⁸¹ The monogram appears at a medallion at the centre of a gilt cross, the only decoration on this tableware. In an entirely different manner, this liturgical word was endowed with a cruciform structure in pre-Carolingian Latin manuscript culture: for example, the word AMEN was written twice to produce a cruciform graphic device between Books 7 and 8 of Isidore's *Etymologies* originating from the northern Italian monastery of Bobbio in the first half of the eighth century—the two words sharing the letter M (Fig. 7.14c).⁸²

Another substantial group of late antique graphic invocations was addressed to divine agents. As shown by polycandela from the Sion Treasure, in the mid-sixth century such textual requests could be addressed to Holy Sion or the Thrice-holy Lord. In the same century, such intercessory formulas could also be directed to the Lord and Theotokos (the Mother of God)—the Council of Ephesus in 431 invested the latter title of Mary with orthodox legitimacy against the objections of Nestorius of Constantinople.⁸³ Thus, for example, the abbreviated expression *Κύριε βοήθει* ('The Lord, help!') was incorporated into scribal subscriptions on Byzantine private charters from Hermopolis in Egypt from the late fifth to the seventh centuries.⁸⁴ As to the invocation of Theotokos, it appears, for instance, on a silver spoon from Toronto produced probably in the sixth century: its handle displays the inscription *ΘΕΟΤΟΚΕ ΒΟΗΘΙ* ('Mother of God, help!') whereas the spoon's disk features the personal box monogram *ΚΟΣΜΑ*.⁸⁵ By the seventh century, a graphic device addressing Theotokos became the most popular intercessory cruciform monogram in the early Byzantine world, in some cases substituted by a similar cruciform monogram addressing the Lord. This new trend is aptly illustrated not only by the aforementioned monumental monograms of Justinian II carved on the Land Wall of Constantinople in 685 (Fig. 7.6c) and of Abbot Hyakinthos on the marble screen in the *Koimesis* church in Nicea,⁸⁶ but also by the

⁷⁹ St Petersburg, National Library of Russia, Lat.Q.v.I.3, fol. 192r. Vessey, ed., *A Companion*, p. 434; CLA, 1.1613.

⁸⁰ Würzburg, UB, M.p.th.f.68, fol. 170v; CLA, 9.1423a.

⁸¹ Dodd, *Byzantine Silver Stamps*, nos. 52–3 (BrM, reg. nos 1848.0601.13 and 1886.0318.2: 613–29/30).

⁸² Wolfenbüttel, HAB, Cod. Guelf. 64 Weiss, fol. 67v; CLA, 9.1386.

⁸³ Price and Gaddis, 'General Introduction', pp. 17–23.

⁸⁴ Diethart, 'Κύριε βοήθει'.

⁸⁵ University of Toronto Art Centre, no. M82.425; Hauser, *Spätantike und frühbyzantinische Silberlöffel*, no. 162; ICA, no. 129061.

⁸⁶ For Hyakinthos' monograms, see Chapter 6.

placement of this type of monogrammatic sign on various dress accessories. For instance, it features on a luxurious gold strap-end found in Mersin, Cilicia, dated to the third quarter of the seventh century (Fig. 7.14d), and on a copper-alloy reliquary belt buckle from a Munich collection, produced in late seventh- or eighth-century Byzantium: both are inscribed with the monogram $\Theta\epsilon\omicron\tau\omicron\kappa\epsilon\ \beta\omicron\gamma\eta\theta\epsilon\iota$ ('Mother of God, help!').⁸⁷ The same monogram can be found on a gold bracelet from Kiev, dated to the second half of the seventh century. In this case, the graphic invocation is accompanied by another cruciform monogram encoding the name of the invocation's beneficiary, Constantine.⁸⁸ Similar apotropaic monograms can be found on a seventh-century Byzantine gold earring at the Rhode Island School of Design Museum,⁸⁹ and on a couple of early Byzantine rings held in the Dumbarton Oaks Collection, which all invoke either Theotokos or the Lord.⁹⁰

Yet it was early Byzantine lead seals that became the default media for such invocal monograms from the seventh to ninth centuries, and this practice persisted in Byzantium until the eleventh century.⁹¹ By the eighth century, the most popular among them expanded the formula $\Theta\epsilon\omicron\tau\omicron\kappa\epsilon\ \beta\omicron\gamma\eta\theta\epsilon\iota$ by adding $\tau\hat{\omega}\ \sigma\hat{\omega}\ \delta\omicron\upsilon\lambda\omega$ between the arms of the cross ('Mother of God, help your servant') on one side (Fig. 7.14e), accompanied by the name of a sealing office-holder on the other. On some lead seals, the name of Theotokos in the cruciform monogram seems to have been replaced with the name of the Lord (Κύριε), who became a common addressee of such graphic invocations in the middle Byzantine period.⁹² During Iconoclasm, and in the eighth century in particular, the names of Theotokos and the Lord in such cruciform invocations were also replaced by addresses to Christ (Χριστέ) and the Holy Trinity (Άγία Τριάς). The latter invocation Άγία Τριάς βοήθει ('The Holy Trinity, help!') was apparently placed on the seals of officials who opposed iconomachy.⁹³

Cruciform monograms with similar invocal formulas also appeared occasionally on other media such as silverware. Thus, the silver ewer of Zenobios from the so-called Albanian Treasure, produced in the seventh or eighth century and currently kept in the Metropolitan Museum of Art, features such graphic devices incised on its bottom—the place that was previously reserved for imperial stamps (Fig. 7.15).⁹⁴ The monograms on the ewer differ from earlier monogrammatic signs on imperial silverware not only in terms of their production—engraving versus stamping—but also in regard to their function: they encode the apotropaic

⁸⁷ Tobias, 'Riemenzungen', pp. 170–2; Schulze-Dörrlamm, *Byzantinische Gürtelschellen*, vol. 2, p. 302, fig. 120.

⁸⁸ Kiev, Museum of Historical Treasures of Ukraine, inv. no. DM-1631; *Byzanz: Pracht und Alltag*, no. 87, pp. 185–6.

⁸⁹ Yeroulanou, *Diatrita*, no. 555. See also similar monograms on the clasp of a necklace and on a ring (Yeroulanou, *Diatrita*, nos. 67 and 301).

⁹⁰ Ross, *Catalogue*, vol. 2, nos. 71 and 110, pp. 61 and 81–2. See also ICA, nos. 62929 and 172120.

⁹¹ Seibt, 'The Use', pp. 8–10.

⁹² Laurent, *Les sceaux byzantins*, pl. XLIII; Metcalf, *Byzantine Seals*, pp. 458–74.

⁹³ For more details and references, see Glynias, 'Prayerful Iconoclasts'.

⁹⁴ New York, MMA, acc. no. 17.190.1704; Dodd, *Byzantine Silver Stamps*, no. 103, pp. 276–7. It was found near the village of Vrap in Albania and subsequently named after the country of its find. Seibt, 'Überlegungen', p. 857, dates its production to around the 670s and 680s.



Fig. 7.15. Bottom of the ewer of Zenobios. New York, MMA, acc. no. 17.190.1704.

invocation 'Lord, help your servant Zenobios. Amen' (*KYPIE/BΩHΘI/TOY ΔΟΥΛΟΥ ΣΟΥ/ZINOBIOY/AMHN*).⁹⁵ Five medallions with these cruciform monograms are arranged to create the sign of the cross, to be deciphered clockwise one after another, with the final word placed at the middle.

In some eastern Christian regions, such as Coptic Egypt and Nubia, people relied on the miraculous protection not only of the Mother of God, the Lord, Christ, and the Holy Trinity, but also of Archangel Michael. Consequently, the monogram of his name must also have been invested with some sort of apotropaic

⁹⁵ Cf. Seibt, 'Überlegungen', pp. 857–8, who questions the reading of the personal monogram as referring to Zenobios due to the absence of an eta and suggests its decoding as presenting the genitive form of the Avar name 'Τζυβίνης' (Tzobon). Yet the koine and Byzantine Greek tended to substitute *ει* and *η* with *ι*, a feature that can be seen on this ewer in the monogrammatic form of the verb *βοήθει* instead of *βοήθει*.

power.⁹⁶ This can be inferred from the recent detailed study of the mummified corpse of a young Christian woman buried in Nubia, near the village et-Tereif in modern Sudan, in c.655–775. She had a box monogram *MIXAHA* (Michael) with the sign of the cross on its top tattooed on the inner thigh of her right leg (Fig. 7.14f). On the one hand, this monogrammatic sign looks similar to the two box monograms (*H ATIA/MAPIA*) that identify the Virgin Mary on a sixth- or seventh-century fresco in the Monastery of Apa Apollo in Coptic Egypt (Bawit, Chapel XVII)⁹⁷ and some pre-Iconoclastic icons from Mount Sinai dated to the seventh and early eighth centuries (Fig. 7.14g).⁹⁸ On the other hand, there had been a tradition of placing tattoos on female bodies in this area in the pre-Christian period, and scholars have connected this earlier tradition to ideas about fecundity and healing practices.⁹⁹ The box monogram of Michael might have been used in a similar healing procedure, or it was tattooed as a graphic protective seal of the kind that was described in the Bruce Codex, discussed in Chapter 1.¹⁰⁰

This graphic sign was different from tattoos (known as *stigmata*) employed in the classical world as well as in late antiquity.¹⁰¹ Late Roman legionaries had imperial marks tattooed on their arms or hands, as outward marks of their military service, and Augustine frequently likened baptismal branding with this kind of marking in the early fifth century.¹⁰² Furthermore, criminals were subjected to penal tattooing, while slaves could receive tattoos on their faces or foreheads as a form of punishment. The monogrammatic tattoo from et-Tereif is, meanwhile, closer to religious tattoos that were known in eastern lands such as Syria and Egypt from the Hellenistic period onwards. Tattoos like these, placed on wrists or necks, marked devotees of certain gods or goddesses, and Christians Copts continued this tradition by tattooing the sign of the cross onto their right wrists, a practice that survives today.¹⁰³

7.4. CHRISTOGRAMS AND THE SIGN OF THE CROSS IN PRE-CAROLINGIAN MATERIAL AND MANUSCRIPT CULTURE

As shown in Chapter 2, christograms such as the chi-rho and tau-rho regularly appeared on various material artefacts and monuments in the fifth-century Mediterranean: for example, on luxurious marble sarcophagi produced in various late antique cities such as Constantinople, Toulouse, and Ravenna (Fig. 7.16). In

⁹⁶ His box monogram has been found carved on a limestone block in early Byzantine Miletus. I am thankful to Joe Glynnias for pointing out this find to me.

⁹⁷ Weitzmann, *The Monastery*, p. 70, fig. 24; Bolman, 'Figural Styles', pp. 151–64, at p. 158.

⁹⁸ Weitzmann, *The Monastery*, pp. 44–5, 50–1, 57–8, 61–4, pls. XXI, XXIII, XXV, LXVIII.

⁹⁹ Taylor and Antoine, *Ancient Lives*, pp. 171–85.

¹⁰⁰ On Michael's perceived healing power in the late antique East, see Arnold, *The Footprints*, pp. 39–49. In early Christian Nubia, St Michael's monogram was also inscribed on church walls and sherds, probably as an apotropaic device.

¹⁰¹ Jones, 'Stigma'.

¹⁰² Vegetius, *Epitoma rei militaris*, 1.8 and 2.5, trans. Milner, pp. 9 and 34; and Ganz, '"Character"'.

¹⁰³ Jones, 'Stigma', pp. 144–5. For a general discussion of tattoo-making in the Middle Ages, see Oschema and Ott, 'Menschenhaut'.



Fig. 7.16. Sarcophagus of Bishop Theodorus from Ravenna, fifth century. Norwegian Institute in Rome, H. P. L'Orange Photo Archive.

the following centuries, these graphic devices continued to complement the sign of the cross ubiquitous in early medieval material culture.¹⁰⁴ In addition, the iota-chi—with the iota taking place of the rho in the chi-rho christogram—also became a relatively popular graphic reference to Jesus Christ in the course of the fifth and sixth centuries. For instance, it takes the central position on the imperial sarcophagus from the Archaeological Museum in Istanbul—framed by a wreath held by two angels—which was carved around the turn of the fifth century.¹⁰⁵ It also functions as the central graphic symbol on the base of the mid-fifth-century column of Marcian in Constantinople.¹⁰⁶ Other examples include an early sixth-century base-metal cross from a collection in Munich on which an iota-chi is employed as Christ's nimbus at the central medallion,¹⁰⁷ and a silver book reliquary with an iota-chi on its front in the Coptic Museum in Cairo, from the Treasure of Abraham, bishop of Hermonthis, c.600.¹⁰⁸ Quite uniquely in the context of late antique and early medieval visual poetry, Venantius Fortunatus also chose the iota-chi as the main structuring form for the *carmen figuratum* that he wrote in Poitiers in the late sixth century as a poetic gift to Bishop Syagrius of Autun (Fig. 7.17)—Venantius' other visual poems being shaped by the sign of the cross.¹⁰⁹

One can discern an awareness of the growing symbolic importance of the iota in the iota-chi christogram in sixth-century written discourse, for example, in Corippus' laudatory poem to Emperor Justin II written c.566. In this panegyric, Corippus emphasizes the symbolic significance of the initial iota that starts the names of Justinian I and Justin II as well as that of Jesus: 'so the glory of the empire, so the holy letter I rises up again from its own end, and Justinian, the great emperor, laying aside old age, lives again in Justin, an emperor with an upright name.'¹¹⁰ From this perspective, it is hardly surprising that a triumphant iota-chi symbolically referring to both Jesus and Justinian I was chosen as the main reverse type of small bronze coins issued in the reconquered Ravenna at the end of Justinian I's reign, c.555–65 (Fig. 7.22a). At the same time, the iota-chi had the same visual silhouette as a six-armed 'magical' character frequently employed on contemporary textual amulets (Fig. 3.15).

The iota-chi thus possessed salvific and apotropaic qualities deriving from official Christian interpretations and deviant ritualistic practices. Such perceived qualities most likely contributed to use of the six-armed iota-chi in sixth-century monumental architecture, where it appeared alongside the mighty sign of the cross or another Christian symbol reminiscent of a 'magical' *character*, namely the eight-armed cross/star. For example, in the early sixth-century Constantinopolitan church of Sts Sergius and Bacchus, this sign, slightly disguised as a flower with six petals, was carved four times on marble plaques between the ground-floor capitals

¹⁰⁴ For more details, see Chapter 3.

¹⁰⁵ Inv. no. 4508 T.

¹⁰⁶ Crow, 'Blessing or Security?', p. 166.

¹⁰⁷ ICA, no. 154039.

¹⁰⁸ Brown, *The Lindisfarne Gospels: Society*, pp. 211–12, fig. 80.

¹⁰⁹ Ernst, *Carmen figuratum*, pp. 149–57.

¹¹⁰ 'sic decus imperii, sanctum sic iota resurgens // exortum est de fine suo, seniumque reponens // nominis erecti Iustino in principe vivit // Iustinianus apex ...', Flavius Cresconius Corippus, *In laudem Iustini Augusti minoris libri IV*, 353–6, ed. Cameron, pp. 47 and 90.

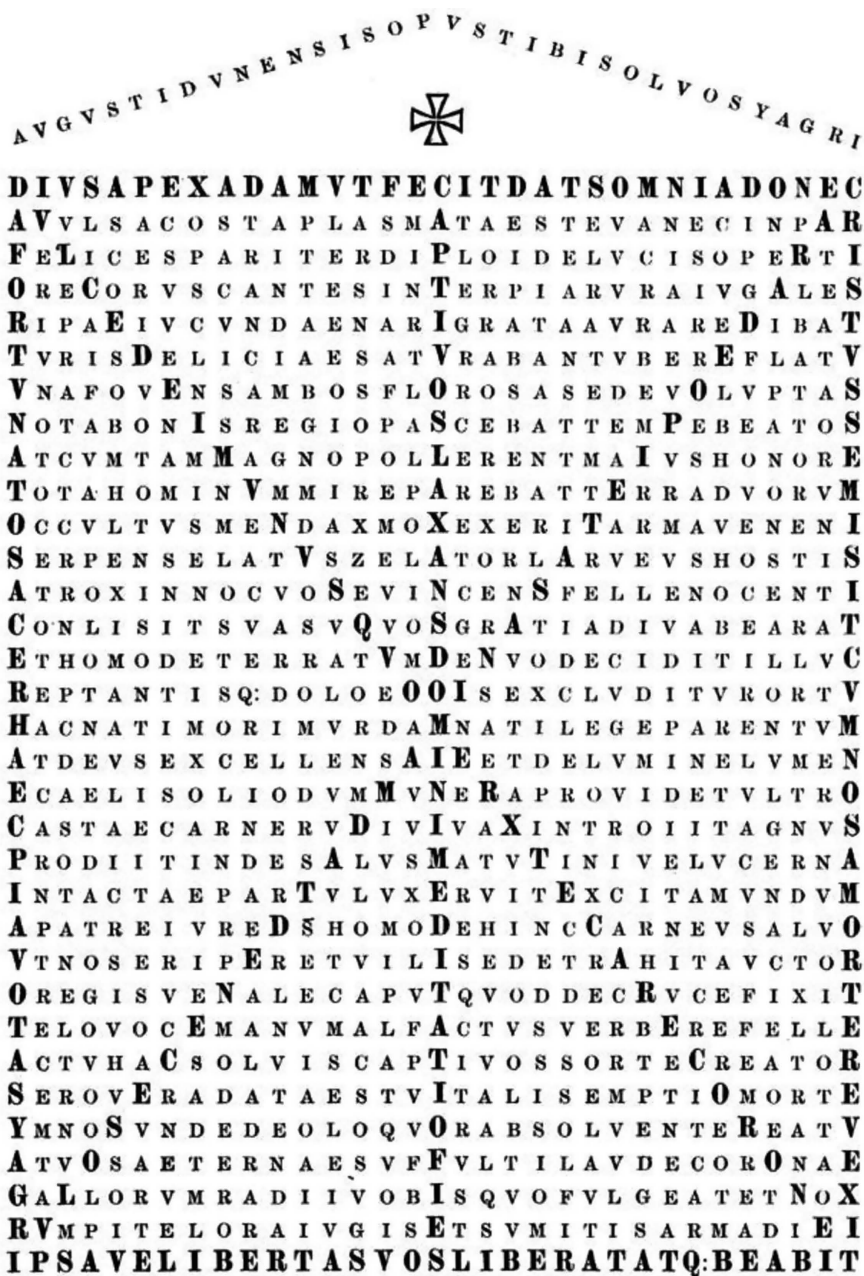


Fig. 7.17. *Carmen figuratum* of Venantius Fortunatus, late sixth century, from Venantius Fortunatus, *Opera poetica*, ed. Leo, p. 116.



Fig. 7.18. Marble decoration in Sts Sergius and Bacchus, Istanbul.

embellished with imperial monograms (Fig. 7.18), while the similarly shaped eight-armed cross appears twice.¹¹¹ The use of the iota-chi was not limited to that church, and the sign featured in other sixth-century monuments of Constantinople, such as the maritime wall in the Mangana area and the Church of St Polyeuktos.¹¹²

In combination with the two aforementioned Christian symbols, the very same christogram played an important role in the iconographic programme of the presbytery in the mid-sixth-century church of San Vitale in Ravenna, a visual programme emphasizing Eucharistic ecclesiology as well as Christ's and the emperor's triumph over the created world.¹¹³ The iota-chi appears in the apse mosaic, in a medallion above the sitting Christ with a cruciform halo behind his head and holding the scroll with seven seals from the Apocalypse (Revelations 5. 1) (Fig. 7.19). A similar interplay between the portrait of Christ and a medallion with the iota-chi was made in another contemporary Ravennate mosaic, namely on the ceilings of the Archiepiscopal Chapel where the golden iota-chi is adorned by angels and the four beasts of the Apocalypse (Fig. 6.17), with two similar iota-chis with alphas and omegas placed on the top of the two adjacent arches. Unlike in the Archiepiscopal Chapel, on the upper eastern wall of the presbytery in San Vitale right above the iota-chi, two angels hold an eight-armed cross—which can also be described as a star with eight rays—with an alpha at the middle, each arm changing its colour outwards from red to orange and thereafter to white. This eight-armed graphic device can be seen as the combination of the sign of the cross and an iota-chi, with

¹¹¹ Guidobaldi and Barsanti, eds, *Santa Sofia*, pp. 266–73, figs 122, 125, 131, and 140.

¹¹² Guidobaldi and Barsanti, eds, *Santa Sofia*, pp. 288 and 451, figs 163 and 277.

¹¹³ For further details and references, see Maguire, *Earth*, pp. 76–80; Wright, 'Iconography'.

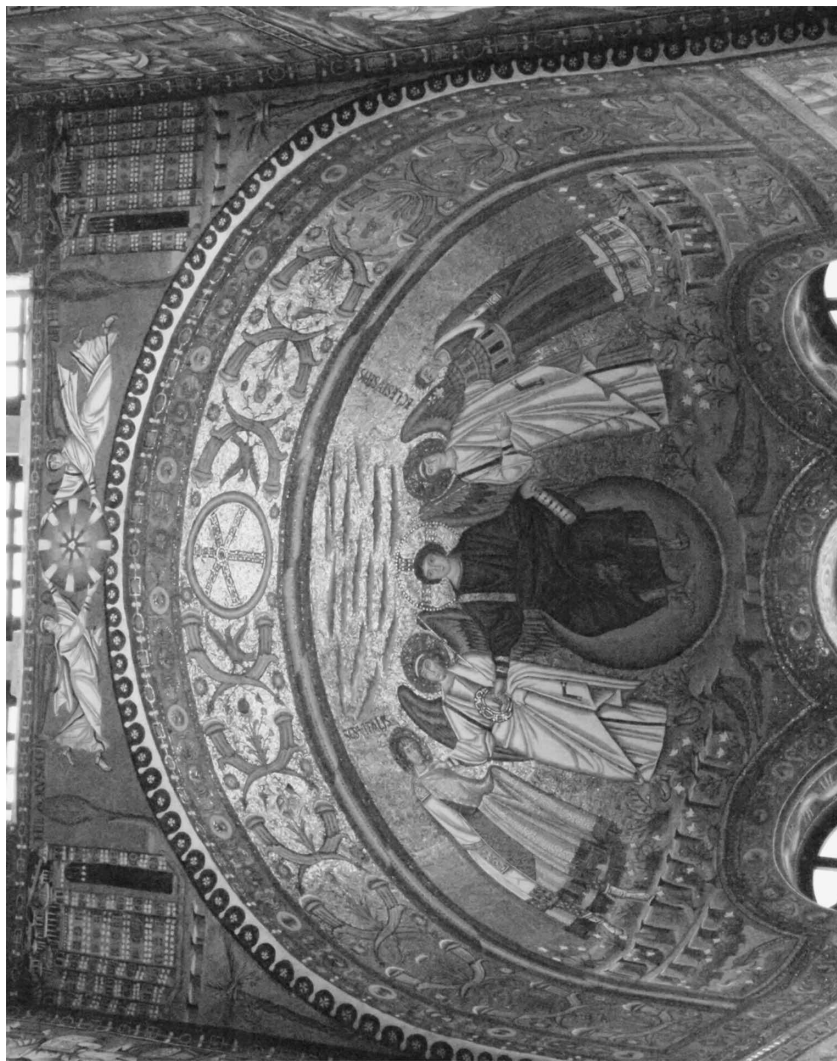


Fig. 7.19. Apse mosaic in San Vitale, Ravenna.

the three colours and the alpha underscoring the eternal existence of God in three persons, in opposition to Arian views on the nature of Christ.¹¹⁴ On the southern and northern upper walls of the presbytery above the scenes of sacrifice in the Old Testament referred to in the early medieval Canon of the Mass, similar angelic pairs held jewelled crosses with two omegas suspended from each of them (Fig. 7.20)—thus pointing out the sacrificial nature of Crucifixion and displaying the triumphant cross as the tool of salvation at the end of the world. The former point is further emphasized by the mosaic on the ceiling right above the altar, displaying the sacrificial Lamb of God held by four angels.

In the same period that the sign of the cross and christograms proliferated in material culture, they also began to be deployed within manuscripts, fulfilling a range of functions. Indeed, a full-page size monogrammatic cross (staurogram) with a pendant alpha and omega became a popular opening decoration in gospel-books. This graphic device occupies such a position in the Gospel of John, written by the priest Maurinus in Italy around the turn of the sixth century (Fig. 7.21).¹¹⁵ Similar monogrammatic crosses were cast in bronze in the same period in Italy, featuring also as a reverse type on some silver coins of Ravenna issued in the name of Justinian I in the mid-sixth century (Fig. 7.22b), and later on they often appeared as a reverse type on Merovingian coinage (Fig. 7.22c).

The above manuscript of Maurinus as well as another early gospel-book—the so-called Codex Corbeiensis produced in Italy in the fifth century—also displays a more prosaic occasional usage of monogrammatic crosses in its margins, with or without an alpha and omega, intended to mark folio gatherings.¹¹⁶ In the majority of cases, the deployment of the sign of the cross and occasionally christograms such as the chi-rho, tau-rho, and iota-chi—regularly accompanied by the two symbolic Greek letters—lay in between luxurious decoration and pragmatic mark. Such Christian signs could be used in colophons,¹¹⁷ precede incipits as well as frame titles,¹¹⁸ and mark sections.¹¹⁹ As late as the early sixth century, crosses began to be incorporated into initials. Thus, in the Parisian manuscript with the canons of church councils and the letters of popes produced in Arles or Lyons in c.523, the

¹¹⁴ On John of Gaza's sixth-century discussion of similar concentric circles in the apse mosaic of the Justinianic basilica at Mount Sinai as a visual reference to both the Trinity and the heavenly sphere, see Maguire, *Earth*, pp. 12–13.

¹¹⁵ Paris, BnF, Ms. lat. 10439, fol. 1v (CLA, 5.600).

¹¹⁶ Paris, BnF, Ms. lat. 10439, fols 174r and 182r; Paris, BnF, Ms. lat. 17225, fols 48v and 153v (CLA, 5.666).

¹¹⁷ See, for example, christograms, both accompanied with a suspended alpha and omega, in Verona, Biblioteca capitolare, Ms. XIII (11), fol. 376r (Italy, s. V, CLA, 4.484), and in the Ussher Gospels (Codex Usseianus Primus) produced at the beginning of the seventh century: Dublin, Trinity College Library, Ms. 55, fol. 149v (CLA, 2.271). For a detailed discussion of the symbolic importance of the latter sign, see Kitzinger, *Cross and Book*, pp. 61–3 and 100–1.

¹¹⁸ e.g. crosses and monogrammatic crosses, in some cases with pendant alpha and omega, in Bologna, Biblioteca Universitaria, Ms. 701, fol. 122v (Italy, s. V²); Paris, BnF, Ms. lat. 12097, fols 1r, 9r, 87v, 137v, (Arles or Lyons?, c.523, CLA, 5.619); Paris, BnF, Ms. lat. 8913, fols 12r, 25r, and 39r (probably Burgundy, s. VI, CLA, 5.573); Paris, BnF, Ms. lat. 11326, fol. 3r (Italy, c.600, CLA, 5.609). See also an iota-chi preceding the title in Paris, BnF, Ms. lat. 12097, fol. 1r.

¹¹⁹ Paris, BnF, Ms. lat. 17226 (Italy, s. VII, CLA, 5.667).

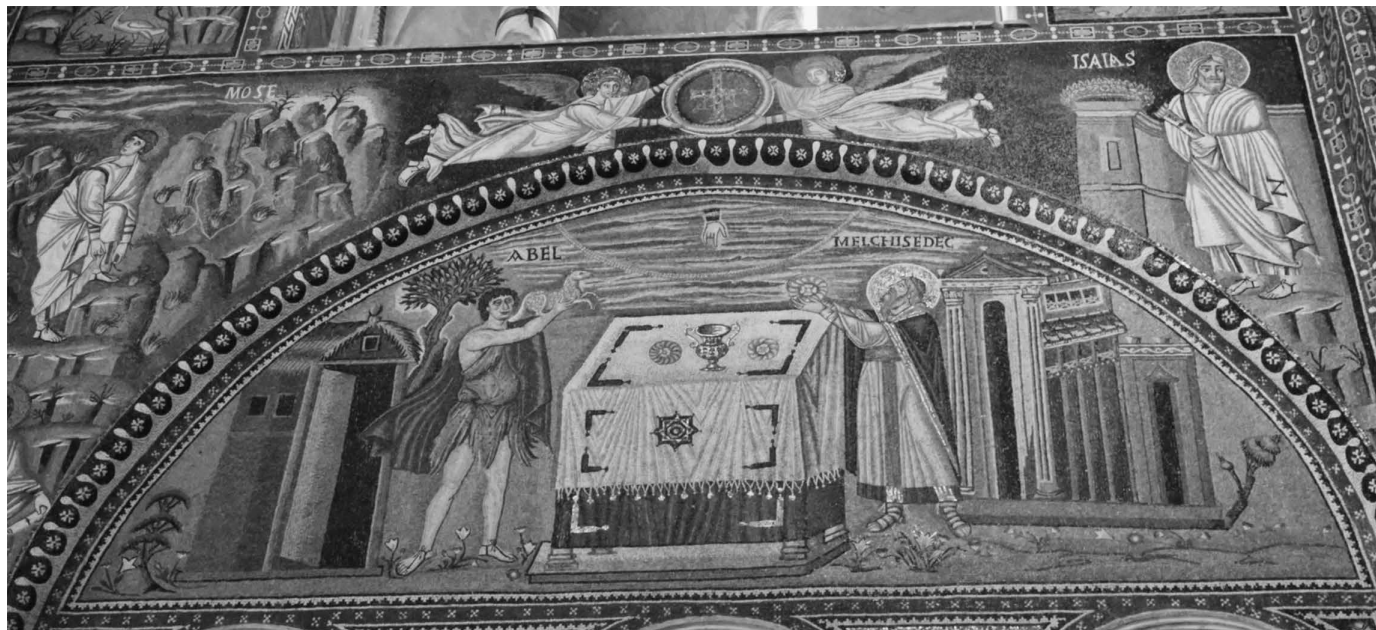


Fig. 7.20. Mosaic from the presbytery of San Vitale.

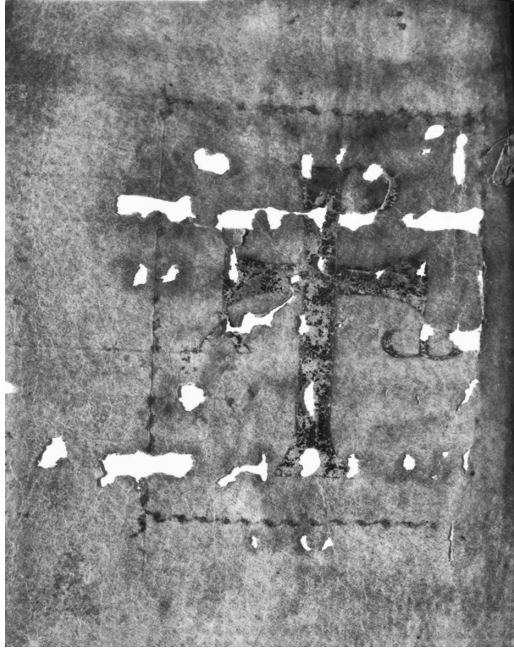


Fig. 7.21. Monogrammatic cross in Paris, BnF, Ms. lat. 10439, fol. 1v.



Fig. 7.22. a–b) Reverse of copper and silver coins of Justinian I from Ravenna (c.555–65), Oslo University, Museum of Cultural History; c) reverse of a Merovingian tremissis (Veuves, c.620–40), Princeton University Numismatic Collection, Department of Rare Books and Special Collections, Firestone Library.

sign of the cross is occasionally drawn inside an uncial D (Fig. 7.23a).¹²⁰ The same sign can be seen inside an initial omega in the sixth-century Greek text of John Chrysostom's homilies,¹²¹ or in a manuscript containing St Paul's epistles created

¹²⁰ Paris, BnF, Ms. lat. 12097, fols 44v, 82r, 89v, 97v, 98v, 118v, and 120v. The same initial can also be seen in the mid-sixth-century manuscript containing Orosius' histories produced in Italy: Florence, Biblioteca Laurenziana, Ms. Plut. LXV, 1, fol. 62v (CLA, 3.298).

¹²¹ Wolfenbüttel, HAB, Cod. Guelf. 75a Helmstedt, fol. 147r.

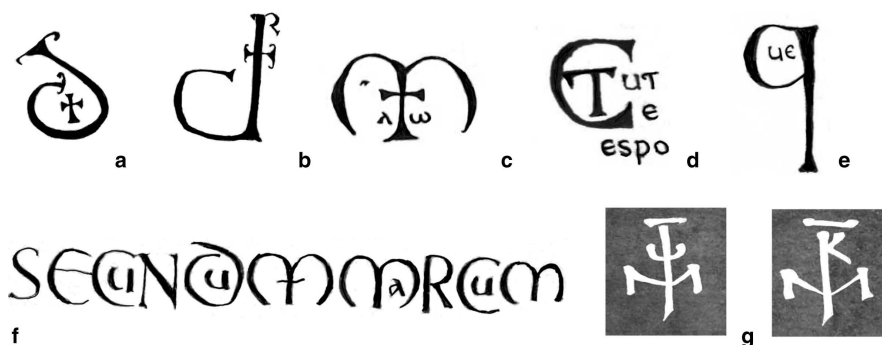


Fig. 7.23. Monogrammatic initials and lettering from late antique manuscripts: a–b) Paris, BnF, Ms. lat. 12097, fols 89v and 97v; c–e) in the palimpsest from León, Archivio Cathedralico, Ms. 15; f) Paris, BnF, Ms. lat. 17226, fol. 91r; g) Uppsala, Universitetsbibliothek, Sign. DG.1.

in North Africa or Spain at the beginning of the sixth century,¹²² and an initial P in the codex from Troyes with Gregory's *Regula pastoralis* produced in Italy, perhaps in Rome, around the turn of the seventh century.¹²³ In the aforementioned manuscript from the Rhone valley, the sign of the cross can also be seen grafted upon the vertical bar of a half-uncial initial d (Fig. 7.23b); similar additions of crosses to the body of initials—such as I, Q, and M—can be observed in the sixth-century text of the *Breviary of Alaric* from Munich originating from southern Gaul,¹²⁴ the Cathach of Colum Cille from Ireland or Iona (c.600),¹²⁵ and the seventh-century Spanish palimpsest text of the *Lex Romana Visigothorum* (Fig. 7.23c).¹²⁶

By the seventh century, the use of the sign of the cross and monogrammatic crosses for various purposes had become a well-established practice in Latin manuscript culture. The gospel-book known as Codex Valerianus produced in northern Italy or Illiricum at the turn of the seventh century illustrates this point.¹²⁷ In this book, for example, a jewelled cross adorned by two birds embellishes a colophon dividing the Gospels of Matthew and John (fol. 81v); a staurogram with a Latin R instead of a Greek rho is drawn in the margins to demarcate Luke 12. 32 (fol. 123v); and a cross surmounts an initial uncial h as a form of decoration (fol. 242r). Yet the most impressive is the jewelled cross with a suspended alpha and omega at the end of the Gospels (fol. 202v; Fig. 7.24). Two birds sit on the horizontal arms of the cross with the bust enface of Christ on its top—thus presenting the cross and the Incarnate Word—and the middle of the

¹²² Munich, BSB, Clm. 6436, fol. 23r. See also the use of decorative crosses inside O, P, d, and q in a mid-sixth-century codex from Ravenna: Florence, Biblioteca Laurenziana, Ms. Plut. LXV, 1, fols 44r, 62v, 133r, 145r.

¹²³ Troyes, BM, Ms. 504, fol. 4r (CLA, 6.838).

¹²⁴ Munich, BSB, Clm. 22501, fol. 11r.

¹²⁵ Dublin, Royal Irish Academy, Ms. 12, fol. 48r (CLA, 2.226).

¹²⁶ León, Archivio Cathedralico, Ms. 15; *Legis Romanae Visigothorum fragmenta*, p. 298 (CLA, 11.1637).

¹²⁷ Munich, BSB, Clm. 6224; CLA, 9.1249.



Fig. 7.24. Codex Valerianus, Munich, BSB, Clm. 6224, fol. 202r.

cross is inscribed in small letters with the scribal subscription: *Ego Valerianus scripsi* ('I, Valerianus, have written [this book]').

The multifaceted use of crosses and monogrammatic crosses in Western European manuscript culture continued in the decades around the turn of the eighth century. Thus, for example, a monogrammatic cross is drawn inside a decorated initial C starting a new section in a text by Gregory the Great written in north-eastern Gaul, possibly in Corbie,¹²⁸ whereas a red Latin cross is drawn inside an uncial initial Q in the fragments the *Edict of Rothar* from Karlsruhe originating from Lombard

¹²⁸ Paris, BnF, Ms. Nouv. Acq. lat. 2061, fol. 74r (s. VII–VIII, CLA, 5.692).

Italy.¹²⁹ Around the same time, richly decorated crosses with or without an alpha and omega also appeared as the central element of frontispiece decoration, as displayed in religious manuscripts produced at the abbey of Luxeuil, an Irish foundation in Burgundy.¹³⁰

From around the turn of the eighth century onwards, this decorative use of crosses was brought to a new level in Insular manuscript culture, where the sign of the cross became the structural principle for diligently executed decorated carpet pages—as one can see for instance in the Book of Durrow, the Lindisfarne Gospels, and the St Chad Gospels.¹³¹ The carpet pages functioned as frontispieces in religious manuscripts (predominantly gospel-books) and as graphic devices introducing a Gospel or marking specific texts. On the one hand, the development of these cross-shaped carpet pages might have reflected an Insular artistic response to seventh-century Christology and the rising cult of the True Cross in the British Isles.¹³² On the other hand, the development of the cruciform carpet pages in Insular art would have been unthinkable without the prolonged use of jewelled crosses as a form of decoration in Latin—as well as Coptic—religious manuscripts in the sixth and seventh centuries.¹³³

Such uninterrupted usage of the sign of the cross in early medieval manuscript culture in the period from the sixth to the early eighth centuries might have been motivated not only by aesthetic imperatives but also by the sign's perceived apotropaic power. Lawrence Nees has suggested that such crosses, especially those placed at the beginning of a book, might have been designed to protect sacred books against demonic penetration.¹³⁴ Yet such apotropaic usage was not limited in the concurrent material culture to unequivocally Christian signs. Henry Maguire has pointed to the employment in early Byzantine ecclesiastical settings, along with more traditional crosses and floral ornaments, of more ambiguous apotropaic graphic signs and devices traditionally associated with late antique 'magical' practices.¹³⁵ A similar usage might not have been unthinkable in early Latin manuscript culture. Indeed, a relevant case can be found in a seventh-century manuscript containing Origen's homilies produced in Gaul or Italy. Explicit and incipit lines between some homilies are preceded by an ornament made of a sequence of one of the most frequently used 'magical' characters, reminiscent of a large letter X (Fig. 7.25), with small circles at the end of each arm typical of such occult *charactera* in their Coptic usage (Fig. 1.7).¹³⁶ Thus, with all the dominance of the sign of the

¹²⁹ Karlsruhe, Badische Landesbibliothek, Aug. Fr. 144 (CLA, 8.**949, s. VII²).

¹³⁰ St Petersburg, National Library of Russia, Lat.Q.v.I.14, fols 1r and 2v (CLA, 11.1617, s. VII, ¾); Valenciennes, BM, Ms. 495 (455), fol. 1v (CLA, 6.841, s. VII, ¾, or s. VIII, ¼); and St Gallen, SB, Cod. Sang. 188, fol. 1r (possibly Luxeuil, c.700 or s. VIII¹, CLA, 7.913).

¹³¹ The Book of Durrow: Dublin, Trinity College, Ms. A. 4. 5. (57), fols 1v, 3v, 85v, 125v; the Lindisfarne Gospels: London, BL, Cotton Ms. Nero D IV, fols 2v, 26v, 94v, 138v, 210v (CLA, 2.187, s. VII–VIII); St Chad Gospels: Lichfield, Lichfield Cathedral, Ms. 1, p. 220.

¹³² For more details and references, see Werner, 'The Cross-Carpet Page'; Bonne, 'De l'ornemental'; Brown, *The Lindisfarne Gospels: Society*, pp. 312–31; Brown, 'The Cross and the Book'.

¹³³ On Coptic sources of inspiration, see Brown, 'The Cross and the Book', pp. 31–2.

¹³⁴ Nees, 'A Fifth-Century Book Cover', pp. 5–6.

¹³⁵ Maguire, 'Magic and Geometry'.

¹³⁶ In some ornamental chains, ivy leaves—earlier linked to Dionysius' cult—are placed inside as symbols of life and resurrection: Paris, BnF, Ms. lat. 1625, fols 2r, 19v, 40r (CLA, 5.532).

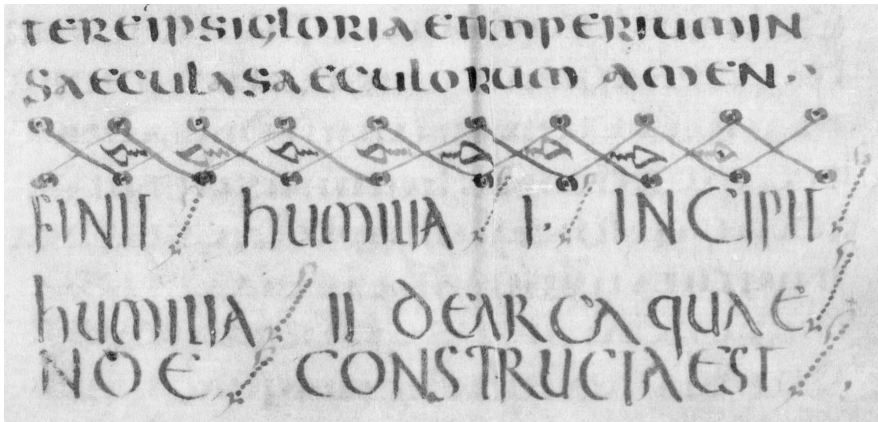


Fig. 7.25. Paris, BnF, Ms. lat. 1625, fol. 1v.

cross and various cruciform devices in pre-Carolingian Europe and a general belief in their salvific and apotropaic powers, less orthodox graphic devices could still appear occasionally within Christian visual settings.

7.5. LATE ANTIQUE MONOGRAMMATIC CULTURE AND THE ORIGINS OF MONOGRAMMATIC LETTERING

Late antique monogrammatic culture that left noticeable visual imprints on various material artefacts in the sixth- and seventh-century Mediterranean also affected concurrent manuscript culture in producing what is termed in this book 'monogrammatic initials', whereby two or more initial letters were combined into a single graphic structure in a manner reminiscent of monograms and distinct from traditional ligatures. An early example of such a graphic device is the ET-initial in which the middle horizontal bar of E serves as the upper bar of T. This initial appears in Latin manuscripts from northern Italy, such as an early sixth-century gospel-book produced somewhere in the province of Aquileia,¹³⁷ a mid-sixth-century copy of Orosius' history attributed to Ravenna,¹³⁸ and the aforementioned Codex Valerianus.¹³⁹ In the seventh century, this monogrammatic form became known in other western lands, and can be seen, for example, in the above-mentioned palimpsest text of *Lex Romana Visigothorum* (Fig. 7.23d).¹⁴⁰ The early palaeographic history of the ET-initial corresponds strikingly to the dissemination pattern of

¹³⁷ This manuscript is shared by libraries in Cividale, Prague, and Venice. See the illustration of fol. 75 in CLA, 3.285.

¹³⁸ Florence, Biblioteca Laurenziana, Ms. Plut. LXV, 1, fols 8r, 28r, 31v, 163v.

¹³⁹ Munich, BSB, Clm. 6224, fols 21v, 44r, 49r, 179v, 187v.

¹⁴⁰ León, Archivio Cathedralico, Ms. 15; *Legis Romanae Visigothorum fragmenta*, p. 36.

decorated initials as outlined by Carl Nordenfalk.¹⁴¹ The two types of initials can also be often found in the same sixth- and seventh-century manuscripts, once again indicating that the early development of decorated and monogrammatic initials were closely related phenomena, originating in the Western Mediterranean, and Italy in particular.

The earliest forms of monogrammatic initials seem to have used the same Gestalt principle as the one used in the monogram of Filocalus in the *Calendar of 354*, namely a smaller letter or several letters were placed inside the closed or semi-closed body of the first initial. Thus, in the aforementioned manuscript from south-eastern Gaul produced c.523, one or several letters occasionally appears inside uncial D;¹⁴² and in the so-called Codex Arcerianus, written in Italy around the same time, small letters are similarly placed inside the inner spaces created by semicircular lines of h and C.¹⁴³ More examples of such monogrammatic initials created inside uncial letters M, O, U, h, and q can be found in the sixth-century *Breviary of Alaric* from southern Gaul, with some initials comprising the letters of an entire word.¹⁴⁴ By the seventh century, this form of monogrammatic lettering was used not only for initials but also in the Incipit and Explicit lines of various manuscripts produced in Western Europe (Fig. 7.23e–f),¹⁴⁵ and this form of decorative lettering became quite popular in the eighth and ninth centuries.

Another early form of monogrammatic device in Western manuscript culture was inspired very directly by late antique monogrammatic culture. Much like late antique monograms, such devices consisted of several letters combined within a single graphic structure. Early examples of such visual forms can be observed in the Codex Argenteus produced in Ostrogothic Italy in the early sixth century and preserving the text of the Gothic Bible. The lower margins of this Bible contain four arches, framing the abbreviated names of the four evangelists written in gold. The names of Mark and Matthew are abbreviated with two bar monograms composed of the first two consonant letters: the former with a *manna* and *redda* (mr) and the latter with a *manna* and *thyth* (mth) (Fig. 7.23g).¹⁴⁶ On the one hand, these graphic devices reflect a more general trend towards the use of monograms to encode sacred names, a trend particularly strong in early Byzantium. For example, the letter *manna* makes these Gothic signs similar to the aforementioned early Byzantine monograms of the Virgin Mary and St Michael, which have a mu (M) as their main graphic frame. On the other hand, the Gothic Bible is written on purple coloured folios in silver and gold ink, which indicates that the codex must

¹⁴¹ *Die spätantiken Zierbuchstaben*, vol. 1, pp. 19–20.

¹⁴² Paris, BnF, Ms. lat. 12097, fols 82r, 87v, 89r,

¹⁴³ Wolfenbüttel, HAB, Cod. Guelf. 36.23 Aug. 2°, fols 6v, 22v, 40v.

¹⁴⁴ Munich, BSB, Clm. 22501, fols 43v, 50r, 68v, 75v, 88v, 112v, 145, 149v, 162v, 163v, 164v, 165r, 171v, 174r, 205r.

¹⁴⁵ See e.g. Paris, BnF, Ms. lat. 17226, fols 9r, 87r, 88v, 91r–v; the palimpsest text in León, Archivo Cathedralico, Ms. 15 (*Legis Romanae Wisigothorum fragmenta*, pp. 6 and 336); Würzburg, UB, M.p.th.q.1a, p. 251 (northern France, s. VI–VII, CLA, 9.1429); Geneva, Bibliothèque Publique et Universitaire, Ms. lat. 16, fols 8r–v, 31v, 32r and Paris, BnF, Ms. lat. 11641, fol. 62v (this manuscript, currently divided between the two libraries, was probably written in Luxeuil, CLA 7.**614).

¹⁴⁶ Uppsala, Universitetsbibliothek, Ms. DG.1.

have been produced for an owner of considerable status. Theoderic the Great has been named as its probable commissioner,¹⁴⁷ and the abbreviation of evangelists' names with such graphic forms would fit well with the prolific monogrammatic culture of his court in Ravenna, as well as the broader culture of Ostrogothic Italy.

In the decades around the turn of the eighth century, both forms of monogrammatic lettering traceable in sixth-century Western manuscripts were brought to a new artistic as well as cognitive level within early Insular gospel-books such as the Book of Durrow, Lindisfarne Gospels, Durham Gospels, and Echternach Gospels, where such graphic devices were used to adorn and enhance the beginning of important sections of the text—such as the monogrammatic initials of the *nomen sacrum* XPI (*Christi*) that begins the genealogy of Christ at Matthew 1.18 (*Christi autem generatio sic erat*), which was treated as a separate book in the Insular manuscript tradition (Fig. 7.26).¹⁴⁸ Most importantly, such forms of monogrammatic lettering were employed in early Insular decorated manuscripts to mark the first word or words in individual Gospels—such as *LIBer generationis* for Matthew (Fig. 7.27), *IN Principio* for John, *QUOniam* for Luke, and *INitium evangelii* for Mark.¹⁴⁹ Such monogrammatic initials were not purely decorative vignettes of the gospel-books visibly dividing its major sections. These graphic devices were 'physical traces or relics of divinity' emphasizing the perception of the Gospels as the living body of the Incarnate Word,¹⁵⁰ and functioned as mystical visual performances to the eyes of their viewers.¹⁵¹ They were also, as Ben Tilghman has asserted, 'aniconic, conceptual models' that communicated extralinguistic messages, relying on the iconographic potential of letterforms.¹⁵² In the eighth and ninth centuries, these artistic forms of monogrammatic lettering spread to the Continent and underwent a further development in Carolingian manuscript culture.

It is important to emphasize here that the increasing employment of monogrammatic lettering and initials in Latin manuscript culture from the sixth to the early eighth century was not just a side effect of late antique monogrammatic culture, nor did it simply result from the growing appreciation of beautiful writing as a form of ornamentation suitable for sacred texts. This development also reflected the growing belief among clerical intellectuals in, and wider appreciation of, the

¹⁴⁷ Munkhammar, *The Silver Bible*; Hen, *Roman Barbarians*, pp. 56–7.

¹⁴⁸ For more details on the initial's symbolic meaning as 'an iconic sign in the shape of the Incarnation', see Farr, 'The Sign'. For a more detailed discussion of this symbolism with reference to the later Book of Kells, see Tilghman, 'Ornament'.

¹⁴⁹ Dublin, Trinity College Library, Ms. A. 4. 5. (57), fols 14r, 193r; London, BL, Cotton Ms. Nero D IV, fols 3r, 27r, 29r, 95r, 139r, 203v, 211r; Paris, BnF, Ms. lat. 9389, fols 19r, 20r, 177r (c.690–710, CLA, 5. 578). On the recent revision of dating for most of these Insular manuscripts, which are currently dated by a decade or two later than was originally suggested, see Nees, 'Recent Trends'; and Brown, *The Lindisfarne Gospels: Society*, pp. 396–400. See also the monogrammatic initial to Mark in an early fragmentary gospel-book from Durham, Cathedral Library, Ms. A. II. 10, fol. 2r. For a detailed discussion of this transition and the relative importance of foreign and indigenous impulses for this development, see Nordenfalk, 'Before the Book of Durrow'; Brown, *The Lindisfarne Gospels: Society*, pp. 227–44 and 331–44; Netzer, 'New Finds'. For the discussion of the rich symbolic meanings encoded by such initials, see also Tilghman, 'The Shape', pp. 292–3 and 296–9.

¹⁵⁰ Kendrick, *Animating the Letter*, p. 174.

¹⁵¹ Pirotte, 'Ornament'.

¹⁵² Tilghman, 'The Shape', pp. 293 and 296.

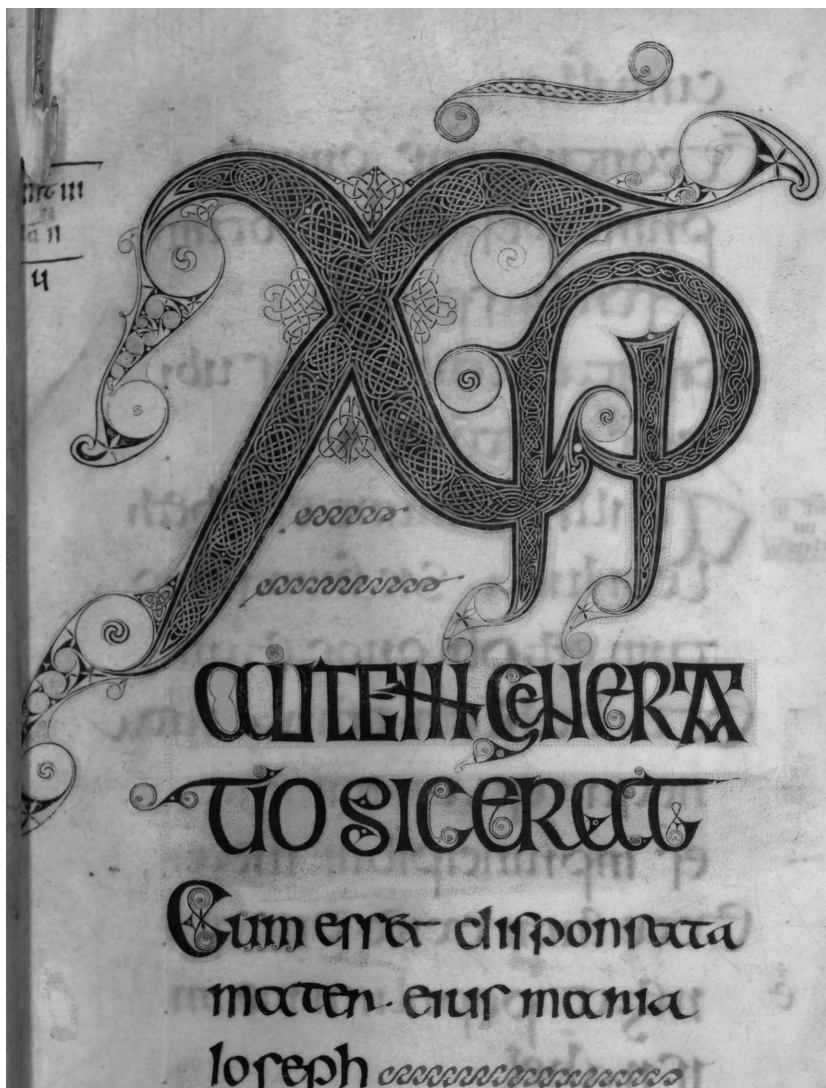


Fig. 7.26. *Christi* initial in the Echternach Gospels, BnF, Ms. lat. 9389, fol. 19r.

capabilities of monogrammatic and ‘imagistic’ lettering to capture the essence of divinity and cosmic order, and to communicate deeper symbolic meanings with visual forms.¹⁵³ In early medieval Christian manuscript culture, some letterforms and their dynamic combinations were thus seen as capable of unveiling hidden true meanings and messages of the Holy Scripture to an inquisitive mind. In short, Christian intellectuals adapted graphicacy for the visual exegesis of sacred texts.

¹⁵³ For further detailed discussion of these aspects of early medieval lettering, see Hahn, ‘Letter’, pp. 56–66; Brown, *The Lindisfarne Gospels: Society*, pp. 233–8.

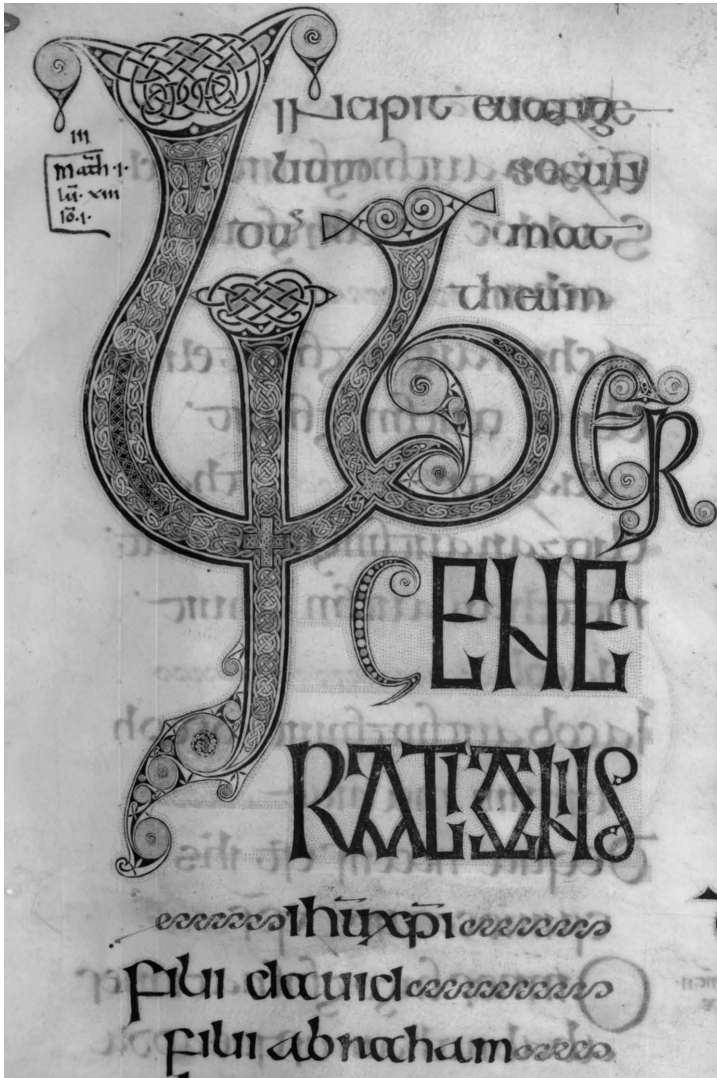


Fig. 7.27. *LIBer generationis* initial in the Echternach Gospels, BnF, Ms. lat. 9389, fol. 20r.

The early medieval discourse on the extralinguistic meanings of letters, the roots of which went back to the patristic era, provides textual evidence to this new visual culture in which the semiology of letterforms became important. Isidore of Seville (c.560–636) provides an early snapshot of this discourse in his treatise *Etymologies*, written in the last decades of his life. In this encyclopaedic work, the Visigothic archbishop described the symbolic meanings of one Latin and five Greek letters, meanings that originated in the classical and early Christian eras.¹⁵⁴ Out of five

¹⁵⁴ Isidore of Seville, *Etymologies*, 1. 3–4, ed. Barney et al., pp. 40–1.

Greek mystical letters, two derived from Greek antiquity—the gamma and theta signifying human life and death respectively. The explanation for the origins of the theta's symbolic meaning is noteworthy, since it shows that Isidore saw this letter as both a phonetic character at the beginning of the Greek word *θάνατος* ('death'), as well as a graphic sign with a spear penetrating it through the middle, thus encapsulating the very same meaning in a visual form. The remaining mystical letters of the Greek alphabet—the thau, alpha, and omega—and the Latin X are explained traditionally with reference to patristic exegesis.¹⁵⁵ But once again, Isidore's text makes it clear that he saw the letters' symbolic potential embedded in their graphic shapes and curves.¹⁵⁶ So, in his opinion, the tau's and X's resemblance to the figure of the Lord's cross reveals their deep meaning to human eyes. Moreover, his description of the alpha and omega invests them with kinetic properties, not dissimilar from those observable in the late antique monograms of Filocalus and Theodosius II, discussed in Chapters 4 and 5: Christ said 'I am Alpha and Omega' for 'by moving towards each other in turn, *α* rolls on all the way to *ω*, and *ω* bends back to *α*, so that the Lord might show in himself both the movement of the beginning to the end, and the movement of the end to the beginning'.¹⁵⁷

Such a symbolic viewing of letterforms implicit in Isidore's narrative became more apparent in the eighth and ninth centuries, not only in the aforementioned development of monogrammatic initials, but also in later texts copying the above passages of Isidore—such as a grammatical compilation by an Irishman, the so-called Donatus Orthigraphus, surviving in a number of ninth-century manuscripts¹⁵⁸—or investing other Latin letterforms and the ways they are drawn with arcane religious references—such as the anonymous text on the Latin letters (*De litteris latinis quidam sapiens interpretaatus est*) preserved in a manuscript from the Carolingian abbey of Fleury.¹⁵⁹ In the latter work, the number of strokes needed to draw different Latin letters were interpreted as referring to the Trinity, the Old and New Testaments, the Jews, and so on. Although this anonymous work has only survived in one Carolingian manuscript and seems not to have influenced contemporary literary culture, its arbitrary interpretations of Latin characters was indicative of wider Carolingian manuscript culture where clerical writers and readers were as attentive to letterforms and their ideographic potentials as they were to their phonetic content. Of course, authors that wrote on *grammatica* in that period frequently quoted Donatus' fourth-century definition of the letter as an elementary particle of articulated speech (*littera est pars minima vocis articulatae*).¹⁶⁰ This definition

¹⁵⁵ For more details, see Chapter 1.

¹⁵⁶ On Isidore's perception of letters as primarily visual characters, see Parkes, 'Reading'.

¹⁵⁷ Isidore of Seville, *Etymologies*, 1. 3. 9, ed. Barney et al., p. 40.

¹⁵⁸ Donatus Orthigraphus, *Ars grammatica*, ed. Chittenden, p. 12. The work has been dated to the early ninth century, although a dating as early as the second half of the seventh century cannot be excluded (pp. xxxiii–xxxiv).

¹⁵⁹ Bern, Stadtbibliothek, Ms. 417; *Grammatici Latini*, vol. 8, *Anecdota Helvetica quae ad grammaticam Latinam spectant*, ed. Keil and Hagen, pp. 302–8. The manuscript has been dated to the first half of the ninth century. For more detailed discussion, see Tilghman, 'The Shape', p. 295.

¹⁶⁰ Irvine, *The Making of Textual Culture*, pp. 97–104. See e.g. Alcuin, *De grammatica*, 269, col. 855A; Murethach, *In Donati artem maiorem*, ed. Holtz, pp. 7–8.

was natural for the late Roman world where the written alphabet was perceived as 'the graphic version of the oral',¹⁶¹ and this perception underpins St Augustine's semiotic theory. Yet for many early medieval grammarians, Latin was all but a natural spoken tongue. It was the language of liturgy as well as the textual culture of silent reading. The Latin letters were more often viewed than heard. Consequently, many early medieval clerics could hardly embrace whole-heartedly the definition's spirit and its implications, and some of them reflected their own cultural contexts and linguistic environments by emphasizing the distinction between the letters' visual forms and their phonetic substrate. Thus, closely following the corresponding section (*De litteris*) in Priscian's work—a work increasingly popular from the early ninth century¹⁶²—grammarians of the Carolingian age such as Donatus Orthigraphus, Sedulius Scottus, and an anonymous author from the Lorsch Abbey defined letters (*litterae*) as inscribed and drawn visual characters (*figurae, notae, or characteres*), and set them apart from corresponding spoken sounds termed as elements (*elementa*)—the latter term explained through the similarity of spoken sounds to the elements of the world (*elementa mundi*).¹⁶³ Such 'liberated' letter-forms could be conjoined and mingled with one another to produce visual shapes that functioned as guardians of meaning,¹⁶⁴ and were designed to make their deeper exegetical significations, or their creators' intended interpretations of corresponding texts, more apparent to the eyes of a reader.

The increasing use of monogrammatic lettering, as well as the appearance of new forms of monogrammatic initials in Carolingian manuscript culture, bore further witness to the perceived authority of these 'script-images' to function as visual exegetical anchors for educated minds and eyes. They provided exclusive access to hidden symbolic meanings within specific sections of religious texts, such as the passages of the Canon of the Mass introduced by the *Te igitur* and *Vere dignum* monogrammatic initials, which became the hallmarks of the ninth-century decorated Carolingian sacramentaries.

¹⁶¹ Cristin, 'Visible/Legible', p. 21.

¹⁶² McKitterick, *The Carolingians*, p. 14.

¹⁶³ Priscianus, *Institutionum grammaticarum libri XVIII*, I, ed. Hertz, vol. 1, pp. 6–7: 'Litteras autem etiam elementorum vocabulo nuncupaverunt ad similitudinem mundi elementorum... Litera igitur est nota elementi et velut imago quaedam vocis literatae, quae cognoscitur ex qualitate et quantitae figurae linearum. hoc ergo interest inter elementa et litteras, quod elementa proprie dicuntur ipsae pronuntiationes, notae autem earum litterae.' Donatus Orthigraphus, *Ars grammatica*, ed. Chittenden, p. 15: '“Elementa” vocantur pronuntiones in ore; “litterae” autem characteres in carta vel in cera.' Sedulius Scottus, *In Donati artem maiorem*, ed. Lösdtedt, pp. 6–7: 'Ergo hoc quod videtur littera est et figura vel nota vel domus elementi. Igitur si elementum est pars minima vocis articulatae, illud quod remanet nota est elementi.' Ars Laureshamensis, *Expositio in Donatum maiorem*, ed. Lösdtedt, pp. 149–50: 'Litterae autem etiam elementorum vocabulo nuncupantur ad similitudinem elementorum mundi... Hoc autem distat inter elementa et litteras, quod elementa proprie dicuntur ipsae pronuntiationes, notae autem earum litterae.' For more details on Priscian, see Chapter 5.

¹⁶⁴ Alcuin called the letters 'the guardians of history' (*custos historiae*) in *Disputatio Pippini regalis et nobilissimi iuvenis cum Albino scholastico*, col. 975C.

8

Monogrammatic Revival in the Carolingian World

The use of monogrammatic initials and ‘imagistic’ lettering visibly increased in Carolingian manuscript culture, where they appear not only in gospel-books but also in sacramentaries and Bibles. Furthermore, a monogrammatic mode expanded to other types of manuscripts and affected other material media, to an extent that one can speak of a peculiar monogrammatic revival taking place at the time of the Carolingian *renovatio*. Thus, not only did the monograms of Carolingian rulers become a default graphic feature of royal diplomas, occasionally appearing on royal seals and coinage too, but other types of monogram also began to be employed for various purposes in concurrent manuscript and material culture. On the one hand, they were used as graphic signs of authority for popes and Carolingian bishops, abbots, and scribes—signs imitating the graphic insignia of Carolingian kings and emperors. On the other hand, once again the ability to create and decipher monograms began to be seen as an ennobling skill, a skill that in this period could only be taught or passed on in a limited number of royal chanceries as well as monastic and cathedral scriptoria. In this capacity, monograms were included in the list of arcane scripts and graphic devices employed by clerical scribes to create a visual sociolect incomprehensible to people outside their ranks and, thus, to mark the superiority of educated clerics over lay people.¹ Through the use of monograms, monogrammatic initials, and ‘imagistic’ lettering, clerical scribes ‘sacralized’, as it were, written Latin and transformed it into the sacred script adequate to represent, as well as to communicate with, the divine. This transformation underscored the unique position of the Carolingian clergy as transmitters of sacred knowledge as well as legitimate ritual specialists negotiating with God on behalf of other social groups.² Moreover, this exclusive position relied heavily on the clergy’s crucial role within Christian liturgy, and its claimed paramount importance for social peace, order, and prosperity. In this broader social perspective, it is hardly surprising that in the Carolingian world many monogrammatic devices embellished the folios of codices produced for liturgical rituals.

¹ For a broader discussion of the use of restricted literacy as a form of social power, see Goody, ‘Introduction’.

² For further details and references, see Garipzanov, *Symbolic Language*, pp. 269–70, 283–5, 291, and 307–8.

8.1. MONOGRAMMATIC INITIALS IN CAROLINGIAN GOSPEL-BOOKS AND SACRAMENTARIES

Carolingian manuscript culture embraced the Insular tradition of adorning the first lines of the Gospels as well as their other important sections with monogrammatic initials and applied it not just in decorated gospel-books but also in Bibles. In these texts of the Holy Scripture, Carolingian courtly, monastic, and cathedral artists appropriated the earlier Insular forms of decorative monogrammatic initials such as *Liber generationis*,³ *INItium evangelii*,⁴ *QUOniam*,⁵ *IN Principio*,⁶ and *NOvum opus*.⁷ But as part of this process of creative adaptation, such initials lost the original kinetic properties of Insular interlacing and curved lettering, and were redesigned along straight horizontal and vertical axes, in a monumental manner reminiscent of late antique Italian forms.⁸ This transformation can, for instance, be traced in the Carolingian history of the *Liber generationis* initial, an initial introducing the first Gospel in the gospel-books. It is one of the earliest graphic devices to appear in this type of Carolingian manuscript, and a curvy L dominates its early form featuring prominently in those gospel-books that were produced by the Court School of Charlemagne around the turn of the ninth century, when a Northumbrian clerical immigrant, Alcuin (d. 804), played an important role at the

³ Paris, BnF, Ms. lat. 9387, fol. 18r (Northern France, s. VIII ex.); London, BL, Harley Ms. 2788, fol. 14r (Court School of Charlemagne, c.800); Paris, BnF, Ms. lat. 8850, fol. 18r (*Katalog*, no. 4568, Court School of Charlemagne, c.810–14); Munich, BSB, Clm. 28561, fol. 15r (Mainz, c.801–15); London, BL, Add. Ms. 11848, fol. 18v (*Katalog*, no. 2361, Tours, c.820–30); London, BL, Add. Ms. 10546, fol. 353r (Tours, c.830–40); Augsburg, Oettingen-Wallerstein Library, Ms. I.2.4.2, fol. 16r (probably Echternach, s. IX, ²/₄, *Katalog*, no. 146, CLA, 8.1215); Munich, BSB, Clm. 4451, fol. 15r (*Katalog*, no. 2962, Mainz, s. X, ²/₄); Berlin, SBB, Ms. theol. lat. 3, fol. 19r (Court School of Lothar I, 840–55, KM, vol. 4, pp. 66–70); Lyons, BM, Ms. 431, fol. 12r (*Katalog*, no. 2549, St Amand, s. IX, ³/₄); New York, ML, Ms. M. 640, fol. 12r (*Katalog*, no. 3617, Belgium, c.850–75); Munich, BSB, Clm. 14000, fol. 17r (Court School of Charles the Bald, c.870, KM, vol. 5, pp. 175–98); Paris, BnF, Ms. lat. 258, fol. 14r (*Katalog*, no. 3972, Brittany, s. IX, ³/₃).

⁴ Paris, BnF, Ms. lat. 9387, fol. 86r; London, BL, Harley Ms. 2788, fol. 72r; Munich, BSB, Clm. 4451, fol. 52r; New York, ML, Ms. M. 728, fol. 64r; New York, ML, Ms. M. 640, fol. 64r; Munich, BSB, Clm. 14000, fol. 47r; Rome, Abbazia di San Paolo f. le mura, Biblia, fol. 271v (Reims, c.870–1, KM, vol. 6.2, pp. 109–74, pl. 280); Paris, BnF, Ms. lat. 270, fol. 42r (Court School of Charles the Bald, s. IX, ³/₄, KM, vol. 5, pp. 157–64; *Katalog*, no. 3984).

⁵ Abbeville, BM, Ms. 4, fol. 102r (Court School of Charlemagne, c.800, CLA, 6.704, *Katalog*, no. 8); New York, ML, Ms. M. 860, fol. 96r (Tours, 857–62); Boulogne-sur-Mer, BM, Ms. 12, fol. 54r (Arras, s. IX, ³/₄, *Katalog*, no. 658); Lyons, BM, Ms. 431, fol. 116r; Munich, BSB, Clm. 14000, fol. 66r; Rome, Abbazia di San Paolo f. le mura, Biblia, fol. 278v (KM, vol. 6, pl. 281).

⁶ Paris, BnF, Ms. lat. 9387, fol. 203r; London, BL, Harley Ms. 2788, fol. 162r; Paris, BnF, Ms. lat. 8850, fol. 181r; Vatican City, BAV, Pal. lat. 46, fol. 108v (*Katalog*, no. 6450, West Rhine area, s. IX, ²/₄); Vatican City, BAV, Ott. lat. 79, fol. 104r (s. IX med.); Augsburg, Oettingen-Wallerstein Library, Ms. I.2.4.2, fol. 127r; New York, ML, Ms. M. 640, fol. 158v; Munich, BSB, Clm. 14000, fol. 98r; Rome, Abbazia di San Paolo f. le mura, Biblia, fol. 288v (KM, vol. 6, pl. 282).

⁷ Augsburg, Oettingen-Wallerstein Library, Cod. I.2.4.2, fol. 5r; Lyons, BM, Ms. 431, fol. 1r; Cologne, EDDb, Ms. 14, fol. 2r (*Katalog*, no. 1871, St Amand, s. IX, ³/₄); Paris, BnF, Ms. lat. 257, fol. 1r (St Amand, s. IX, ³/₄); Paris, BnF, Ms. lat. 270, fol. 2r. On an earlier Insular influence on the design of gospel-books in the late Merovingian Frankish world, see Netzer, *Cultural Interplay*.

⁸ For an Italian influence on Carolingian manuscript illumination, see Belting, 'Probleme'.



Fig. 8.1. *Liber generationis* initial in Wolfenbüttel, HAB, Cod. Guelf. 16 Aug. 2°, fol. 5r.
© HAB Wolfenbüttel <<http://diglib.hab.de/mss/16-aug-2f/start.htm>>

Frankish royal court.⁹ Yet by the mid-ninth century, some Carolingian scriptoria such as those in Reims and Tours abandoned this early blueprint and employed, instead, the straight lines of intercrossing L and I, working to embed the sign of the cross in the initial's graphic structure (Fig. 8.1).¹⁰

⁹ On these gospel-books and the court atelier in general, see KM, vol. 2; Mayr-Harting, 'Charlemagne', pp. 44–58; McKitterick, *Charlemagne*, pp. 350–63.

¹⁰ Eprenay, BM, Ms. 1, fol. 19r (Reims, c.823–9, KM, vol. 6.1, pp. 73–84); Paris, BnF, Ms. lat. 17968, fol. 16v (Reims, s. IX¹, KM, vol. 6.1, pp. 150–8); Wolfenbüttel, HAB, Cod. Guelf. 16 Aug. 2, fol. 5r (Tours, 840–3, *Katalog*, no. 7284); Paris, BnF, Ms. lat. 9385, fol. 19r (*Katalog*, no. 4575, Tours, 843–51); Laon, BM, Ms. 63, fol. 26v (*Katalog*, no. 2057, Tours, 843–51); Paris, BnF, Ms. lat. 266, fol. 23r (Tours, 849–51, *Katalog*, no. 3980); Reims, BM, Ms. 2, fol. 15r (Reims, s. IX



Fig. 8.2. *IN principio* initial in London, BL, Egerton Ms. 768, fol. 63r.

Other initials also experienced noticeable changes around the mid-ninth century, for example, in the rich royal abbey of St Amand and the related scriptoria situated in the northern areas of the West Frankish kingdom, which are known collectively to modern art historians as the Franco-Saxon School.¹¹ In the gospel-books produced by this school in the second half of the ninth century, an I and N at the beginning of the Gospel of John were conjoined in an inseparable monogrammatic union that occupies an entire page (Fig. 8.2).¹² This monogrammatic

med., KM, vol. 6.2, pp. 101–8, *Katalog*, no. 5244); Reims, BM, Ms. 7, fol. 22r (Reims, s. IX, $\frac{3}{4}$, KM, vol. 6.2, pp. 93–9, *Katalog*, no. 5247); Cologne, EDDB, Ms. 1, fol. 304r (*Katalog*, no. 1861, Tours, c.857–62); New York, ML, Ms. M. 860, fol. 15r; New York, ML, Ms. M. 728, fol. 15r (Reims, s. IX, $\frac{3}{4}$, KM, vol. 6.2, pp. 83–92, *Katalog*, no. 3619); Troyes, BM, Ms. 138, fol. 12r (*Katalog*, no. 6246, Tours, s. IX, $\frac{3}{4}$). See also Mütterich, 'Carolingian Manuscript Illumination'; Denoël, 'Entre diversité et inventivité'.

¹¹ Denoël, 'Saint-Amand'.

¹² New York, ML, Ms. M. 862, fol. 145v (St Amand, 855–65, *Katalog*, no. 3621); Lyons, BM, Ms. 431, fol. 184r; Cologne, EDDB, Ms. 14, fol. 161v; Paris, BnF, Ms. lat. 257, fol. 149r; Halle, Universitäts- und

device introducing the first phrase of this Gospel (*In principio erat Verbum et Verbum erat apud Deum et Deus erat Verbum*) thus allowed its viewer to visualize the primordial Word co-existing and co-substantial with God. Moreover, the two conjoined letters could be seen as referring to the two initials of one of Jesus' names, *Iesus a Nazareth* (Acts, 10.38), while the letter I placed on the N with noticeable horizontal extensions on the top of its vertical column may allude to the Crucifixion. Thus, to a contemplative eye, this graphic device could also evoke the Incarnate Word and the Passion. Such contemplation was encouraged by King Charles the Bald's intellectual milieu, in which John Scottus Eriugena completed a new Latin translation of Pseudo-Dionysius' works and, similar to the Greek mystic, stated that visual forms of sensible things help viewers to perceive the Word of God.¹³

The graphic invention of the Franco-Saxon School thus clearly reflects the earlier Insular and ninth-century Carolingian perception that the authority of the divine word in luxurious manuscripts should be highlighted by visual means. Because of the visual symbolism of their conflated letters and their eye-catching character, monogrammatic initials were perceived as appropriate for precisely that function. This point is exemplified further by the fact that Carolingian clerical artists introduced new monogrammatic forms for the books of the Bible starting with the word VERbum Domini or VERba (such as Deuteronomy, Ecclesiastes, Jeremiah, Joel, and Zephaniah).¹⁴ Carolingian inventors were also capable of appropriating late antique pre-Insular monogrammatic forms such as the ET initial originating in the sixth century, and they turned this graphic device projecting the sign of the cross in its structure into a sophisticated monogrammatic initial worthy of the books of the Bible,¹⁵ as well as commentaries on them.¹⁶

At the same time, the invention of the mid-ninth-century IN initial mirrors specific Carolingian settings where the nature of divine personas, and Christ in particular, were brought back into theological debates and the minutes of church councils. This conclusion is in agreement with a growing awareness among modern art historians of the powerful impact that such theological matters and specific historical contexts exercised on the visual agenda of clerical masters producing Carolingian liturgical as well as, more generally, religious manuscripts.¹⁷ Modern research has also shown that the impact of such contexts and debates on the

Landesbibliothek Sachsen-Anhalt, Qu. Cod. 83, fol. 145r; Leiden, Universiteitsbibliotheek, BPL 48, fol. 193r; London, BL, Egerton Ms. 768, fol. 63r (*Katalog*, no. 2434, possibly Corbie, s. IX, $\frac{4}{4}$).

¹³ For more details, see O'Driscoll, 'Visual Vortex', pp. 318–21. On the translations of Pseudo-Dionysius in the Carolingian age, see Rorem, *Eriugena's Commentary*.

¹⁴ Paris, BnF, Ms. lat. 11504, fols 58v, 187v (*Katalog*, no. 4684, around Paris, 821/2); Rome, Abbazia di San Paolo f. le Mura, Biblia, fols 130b, 161r, 165v, 194r (KM, vol. 6, pls 268, 285c, 287d, 289b).

¹⁵ Rome, Abbazia di San Paolo f. le Mura, Biblia, fols 60v and 163r (KM, vol. 6, pl. 259 and 286); Paris, BnF, Ms. lat. 2, fol. 213v (KM, vol. 7, pl. 101d).

¹⁶ Boulogne-sur-Mer, BM, Ms. 35, fols 36r and 67v (St Bertin, s. X, c. $\frac{3}{4}$, *Katalog*, no. 664).

¹⁷ See e.g. Nees, 'Image and Text'.

development of monogrammatic initials in Carolingian sacramentaries was as important as it was in gospel-books and Bibles.¹⁸

Sacramentaries constitute a form of liturgical book typical of the Carolingian world. They provided priests with the authoritative texts of prayers they had to recite during the masses of the temporal and sanctoral cycles of the liturgical year, as well as votive masses performed for special occasions. Along with gospel-books and lectionaries, Carolingian sacramentaries thus became essential books that priests required in order to perform masses in a manner sanctioned by the ecclesiastical hierarchy.¹⁹ Two main types of sacramentaries were copied in Carolingian scriptoria: Gelasian sacramentaries—owing their name to a faulty attribution of their prototype to Pope Gelasius—constituted the earliest type disseminated in the Carolingian world from the mid-eighth century, whereas Gregorian sacramentaries—traditionally connected to Pope Gregory the Great—represented a new sacramentary type, brought to Francia from papal Rome around the turn of the ninth century. The latter became the type most often copied in the ninth century due to its origins and its perceived authoritative nature.²⁰

With a few notable exceptions, most of these liturgical books either lack or have a limited number of illuminations or 'imagistic' lettering of the kind one can see in the sumptuous Insular and Carolingian gospel-books. After all, unlike gospel-books that were viewed as the embodiments—so to speak—of the living Word of God, sacramentaries served their owners, priests and bishops, first and foremost, as practical manuals.²¹ Nonetheless, two phrases in these books, namely *Vere dignum* and *Te igitur*, received special treatment from the turn of the ninth century onwards.²² These formulas introduce specific sections of the Canon, that is, the permanent core of the mass performed at every eucharistic service. It is probable that many Carolingian priests learned them, either before taking up their office or soon thereafter. Such key wordings and the passages that followed them must have become engraved in their performative memories through every mass they celebrated. For this reason, the producers of such liturgical manuscripts could assume that the books' primary users knew such phrases by heart, and therefore replaced some lines of text with visual graphic devices, inviting the celebrants to contemplate the deeper meanings of key phrases they regularly uttered during ritual communication with the Lord.

The *Vere dignum* device—a monogrammatic sign abbreviating the phrase with its conjoined initial letters, V and D—can be traced in surviving manuscript evidence from as early as c.700. A comparison between two early liturgical manuscripts, the

¹⁸ See Leesti, 'The Pentecost Illustration'; Baert, 'Le sacramentaire de Gellone'; Chazelle, 'An *Exemplum*'; and Kessler, 'Dynamic Signs'.

¹⁹ On this Carolingian trend to limit various eucharistic practices existing among lower social ranks and to impose the liturgy of mass performed by a priest in an orthodox manner as the only legitimate ritual setting for the eucharist, see Chazelle, 'Eucharist'; and Chazelle, 'Mass and Eucharist'.

²⁰ For further details and bibliographic references on eighth- and ninth-century sacramentaries, see Palazzo, *A History*, pp. 42–56; and Garipzanov, *The Symbolic Language*, pp. 55–96.

²¹ On ornamentation and the visibility of letters in the latter type of liturgical manuscript, see Méhu, 'The Colors', pp. 260–3.

²² Palazzo, *A History*, p. 57.

Missale Francorum and the *Missale Gothicum*, produced around that time, allows us a glimpse of its early history.²³ Both manuscripts feature many austere decorated initials, with some simple monogrammatic initials known as early as the sixth century where the body of an initial such as a D or an O is used as an external frame for a smaller follow-up letter/s. Whereas the *Missale Gothicum*, which is a fine example of Gallican liturgy, presents a wide range of such initials, it spells out the *Vere dignum* formula entirely without recourse to any abbreviated form.²⁴ By contrast, the other missal from Merovingian Gaul, the *Missale Francorum*, features the ligature abbreviation of *Vere dignum* (VD)—always indicated by a contraction sign on the top—and its frequent usage in various collects throughout the codex suggests that this graphic device had already become an established form of abbreviation in some scriptoria around the time of the manuscript's production.²⁵

The Frankish Gelasian sacramentaries of the second half of the eighth century, such as the mid-eighth-century Vatican Sacramentary and the late eighth-century Sacramentary of St Gall,²⁶ continued to display this VD abbreviation, with an important innovation: the contraction line was moved down and now crossed the central horizontal line of the ligature, thus incorporating the symbol of the cross at its middle (Fig. 8.3a). At the same time, the *Vere dignum* phrase in the Canon was still spelled out in its entirety, with an initial V highlighting the beginning of the section, whereas a larger initial T marked the following section introduced by the

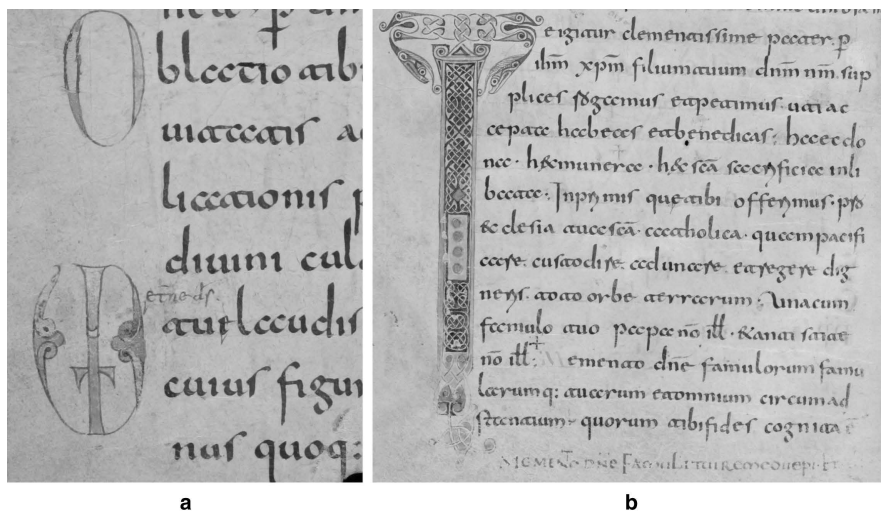


Fig. 8.3. Initials in St Gallen, SB, Cod. Sang. 348: a) *Vere dignum* (p. 367); b) *Te igitur* (p. 368).

²³ *Missale Francorum*, ed. Cunibert; and *Missale gothicum*, ed. Rose.

²⁴ Vatican City, BAV, Reg. lat. 317, fol. 61r.

²⁵ Vatican City, BAV, Reg. lat. 257, fols 92v, 99r, 103v, 106v, 110v, 114r, 125v, 131r.

²⁶ Vatican City, BAV, Reg. lat. 316 (Chelles or Joazeur); *Liber sacramentorum Romanae Aecclesiae*, ed. Mohlberg. St Gallen, SB, Cod. Sang. 348 (Chur, c.796–806); *Das fränkische Sacramentarium gelasianum*, ed. Mohlberg.

formula *Te igitur* (Fig. 8.3b).²⁷ The latter initial had a history as old as that of the VD monogrammatic device, since it already features in the Bobbio Missal, a lectionary-sacramentary produced north of the Alps c.700.²⁸ In some later Gelasian sacramentaries, meanwhile, this T initial developed into a decorated tau-cross of Jesus,²⁹ thus reminding the viewer of the sacrificial nature of Crucifixion—the idea that the Gellone Sacramentary, created in Cambrai or Meaux around the 790s, visualizes with its famous image of the crucified Jesus on the tau-cross of the *Te igitur* formula.³⁰ The same codex displays a VD decorated initial in the preceding section of the Canon (fol. 143r). This initial is much larger than traditional VD abbreviations, one of which can be seen on the top of that folio. These parallel visual emphases on the *Vere dignum* and *Te igitur* initials of the Canon were hardly only due to the lavish decorative program fulfilled in the Gellone Sacramentary.³¹ In another—rather modest—liturgical book produced in Autun c.800, the two sections are similarly highlighted with a large decorated T and a large size VD initial, the latter in an Insular manner with a range of dots around its edges (Fig. 8.4).³²

A visual emphasis that some Frankish scriptoria gave to the two sections of the Canon in the second half of Charlemagne's reign was continued in the Gregorian sacramentaries, where the text of the Canon is located at the beginning of a manuscript and often highlighted by the use of special fonts, colours, and other visual means. Thus, in the earliest surviving liturgical book of this type, produced in Cambrai in 812, both formulas are embellished with small initials VD and T and, like much of the Canon, they are written with golden ink.³³ The manuscript evidence indicates that the above visual emphasis on the two formulas increased considerably in some Frankish scriptoria in the mid-ninth century. In the Sacramentary of Marmoutier produced at Tours c.845, the two initials face each other (Fig. 8.5): the *Vere dignum* decorated monogram takes the upper side of folio 8v whereas the initial T of *Te igitur* dominates the opposite folio (fol. 9r) with the remaining letters written in gold and twice as large as the remaining text on the page.³⁴ The producers of the sacramentary obviously treated the two initials quite differently from the rest of the text of the Canon, allowing both their viewers

²⁷ St Gallen, SB, Cod. Sang. 348, pp. 367–8.

²⁸ Paris, BnF, Ms. lat. 13246, fol. 11v; *The Bobbio Missal*, ed. Wilmar et al. For the most detailed discussion of the manuscript, see Hen and Meens, eds, *The Bobbio Missal*. For a discussion of the initial, see Méhu, 'The Colors', p. 261. It is noteworthy that *Vere dignum* on fol. 11r is spelled out in full and the VD initial is not used elsewhere in the manuscript.

²⁹ St Gallen, SB, Cod. Sang. 348, p. 368.

³⁰ Paris, BnF, Ms. lat. 12048, fol. 143v; *Liber sacramentorum Gellonensis*, ed. Dumas and Deshusses.

³¹ On 'imagistic' lettering in this sacramentary and its performative nature, see Hahn, 'The Performative Letter'.

³² Berlin, SBB, Ms. Phill. 1667, fols 103r–v; *Liber sacramentorum Augustodunensis*, ed. Heimig; *Katalog*, no. 405.

³³ Cambrai, BM, Ms. 164, fols 37v–38r.

³⁴ Autun, BM, Ms. 19 bis, fols 8v–9r; *Le sacramentaire de Marmoutier*, ed. Décréaux, vol. 1. For discussion of the VD decorated initial in the Sacramentary of Marmoutier and its various symbolic meanings, see Kessler, 'Dynamic Signs', pp. 124–7.

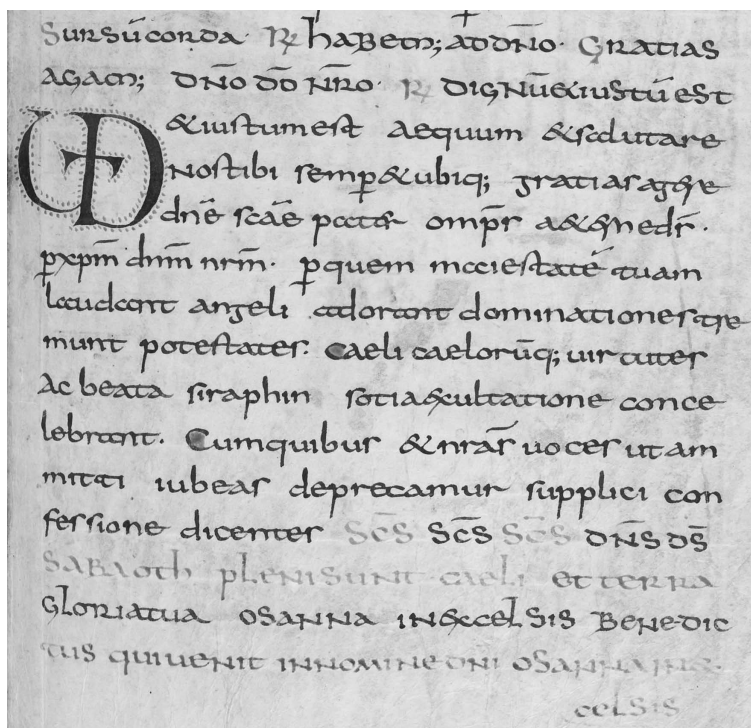


Fig. 8.4. *Vere dignum* initial in Berlin, SBB, Ms. Phill. 1667, fol. 103r.

and their performers to contemplate carefully the nature of the liturgical passages introduced by these formulas, as well as their deeper meanings.

The VD initial introduces the first words '*vere dignum et iustum est*' ('it is truly fitting and just') of the preface to the Great Prayer of the Mass, a prayer accompanying the holy mystery of the eucharist.³⁵ The initial immediately follows the so-called introductory dialogue, namely an exchange of short utterances between the priest and mass attendants, reminiscent of late antique acclamations.³⁶ This similarity should not really surprise us, since both the text of this introductory dialogue and the priest's following phrase '*vere dignum et iustum est*' are attested by third-century textual liturgical evidence, and the origin of the last two phrases of the dialogue can even be traced to the earlier Jewish order of prayer.³⁷ These last phrases include the priest's exhortative statement *gratias agamus domino deo nostro* ('Let us give thanks to the Lord, our God') and the people's acclamatory response *dignum et iustum est* ('It is fitting and just'). Such early liturgical usage of the latter

³⁵ For a discussion of this initial in medieval liturgical manuscripts, see Millesoli, 'Il *Vere dignum*'.

³⁶ On the connection between late Roman acclamations and the early Christian ritual, see Roueché, 'Acclamations at the Council'; Williams, 'Hymns'.

³⁷ *Didascalia et Constitutiones Apostolorum*, VIII, 12, 4–7, ed. Xavier von Funk, vol. 1, p. 497. Millesoli, 'Il *Vere dignum*', pp. 136–7; Jungmann, *The Mass*, vol. 2, pp. 110–13.

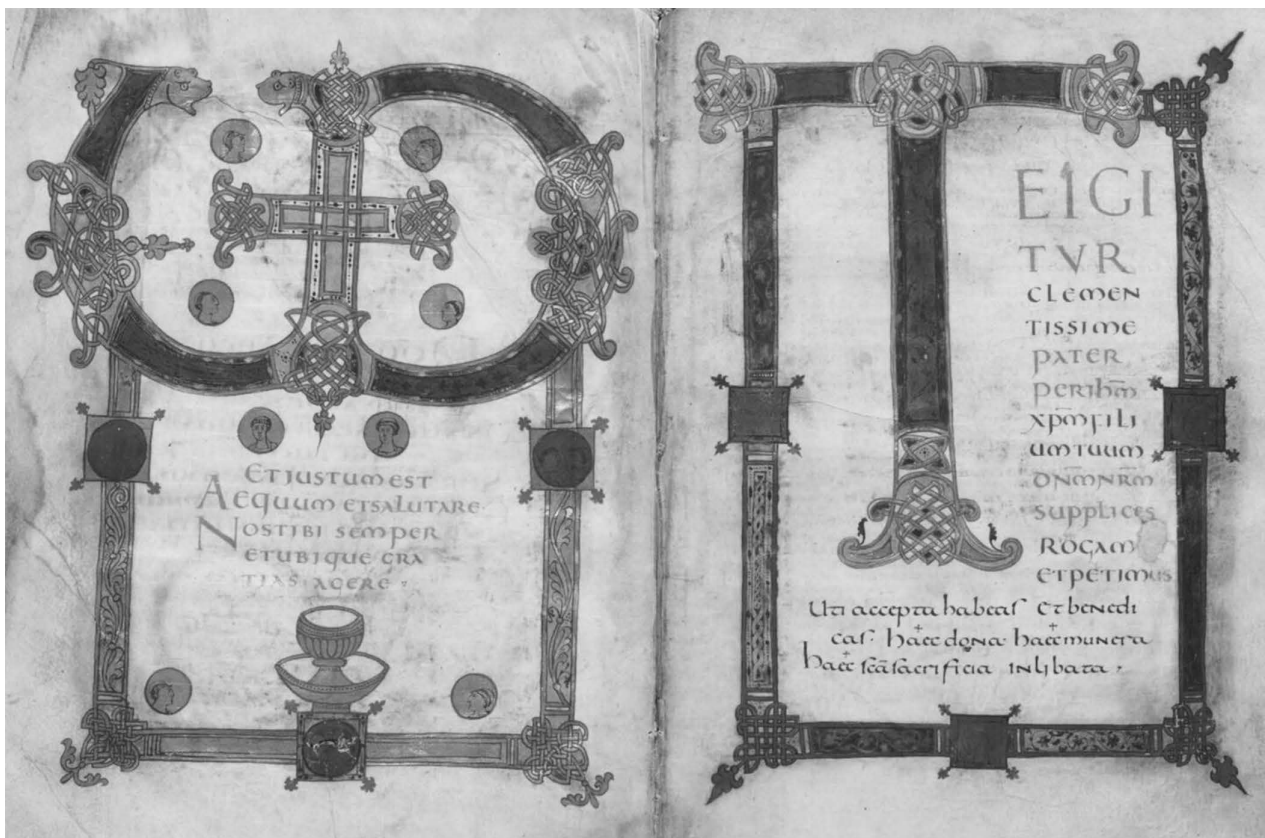


Fig. 8.5. *Vere dignum* and *Te igitur* initials in Autun, BM, Ms. 19 bis, fols 8v–9r. © IRHT.

acclamation is hardly accidental since it was commonly used in the Roman world to validate and reinforce important collective decisions or elections, including that of a Roman emperor.³⁸ This late Roman acclamation was adapted to the early Christian Mass as an empowering form of the collective ritualized speech-act through which the Christian community, gathered in the church, not only praised God but also confirmed their collective participation in the eucharistic ceremony. It is because of its validating power that the priest had to reiterate this acclamation immediately in the starting lines of the eucharistic prayer: '*vere dignum et iustum est... gratias agere*' ('it is truly fitting and just... to give thanks [to the Lord]'). By extending the acclamation's symbolic performative and validating power beyond its more limited aural form of existence, the VD monogrammatic initial was similar to other late antique acclamatory monograms such as the one in the *Calendar of 354* or those produced by circus factions in late antique Aphrodisias and Ephesos.

Moreover, the graphic structure of the VD initial makes it comparable to early Byzantine cruciform intercessory monograms, in that from as early as the mid-eighth century the sign of the cross had become its core graphic element. In the aforementioned sacramentary of Marmoutier, the key role of that sign is underscored further by four medallions between its arms, which present portraits of monks facing the redemptive sign in adoration (Fig. 8.5). In the early Middle Ages, the sign of the cross became the most efficacious Christian graphic sign, a sign that liturgical celebrants repeatedly drew in the air with their hands to empower ritualized utterances during liturgical mysteries. Carolingian priests increasingly signed the cross over eucharistic elements in the liturgy of mass. The cross of the monogrammatic acclamation fulfilled an identical function by means of graphicacy and empowered the priest to beseech the Lord on behalf of his liturgical community. As Herbert Kessler puts it, 'creating a cross from interlocking circular forms, the ligature mimics the transformation of the bread and wine through the speech-act of uttering the text the letters adorn.'³⁹

Unlike the VD monogram, the T initial on the opposite folio of the Sacramentary of Marmoutier evokes the physical shape of the cross used at the Crucifixion, the tau-cross (Fig. 8.5). The latter initial introduces one of the oldest parts of the Roman Canon with its origins stretching back to late antiquity,⁴⁰ namely the eucharistic prayer of the celebrant pleading that God accept the offerings of his faithful flock, which by the eighth century was introduced with the formula *Te igitur*. In Carolingian times this prayer was already viewed as opening the proper *canon actionis*, and the celebrant performed it alone either in a low voice or in silence.⁴¹ The decorated T thus visualized this crucial section of the Canon,⁴² but this initial was more than a simple dividing marker. It introduced the liturgical invocation encapsulating the Christian dogma on the nature of Christ, a topic that once again became arduously debated in the early Carolingian world with the rise

³⁸ Lang, *The Voice*, p. 104.

³⁹ Kessler, 'Dynamic Signs', p. 121.

⁴⁰ Moreton, 'Rethinking the Origin', pp. 65–6; Lang, *The Voice*, pp. 60–2 and 77–80.

⁴¹ Andrieu, ed., *Les Ordines Romani*, vol. 2, pp. 95 and 221. See also Jungmann, *The Mass*, vol. 2, pp. 147–52; Lang, *The Voice*, pp. 131–3.

⁴² Chazelle, *The Crucified God*, p. 152.

of Adoptionism in Visigothic areas and its emphasis on Christ's 'adoptive yet sinless humanity'. Having misconstrued these Christological views as claiming that Jesus Christ was adopted into the Trinity, Charlemagne, his clerical advisors, and Frankish bishops made sure to suppress these views harshly in the 790s.⁴³

The Gregorian sacramentary was thus brought to the Frankish lands at the time when the succinct expression of Christological orthodoxy in its eucharistic prayer—namely that Christ was the genuine son of God—was indeed timely:

Te igitur, clementissime Pater, per Jesum Christum Filium tuum Dominum nostrum, supplices rogamus ac petimus. . . .

(To you, therefore, the most merciful Father, through Jesus Christ, your Son, our Lord, we make humble prayer and petition. . . .)

This prayer is also peculiar in its inverted sentence structure whereby its addressee, God the Father, is mentioned first and the celebrant's intermediary, God the Son, is placed second. This sentence has been interpreted as emphasizing the salvific role of Jesus Christ in the relationship between the Christian community and God, the bond that every mass confirms; and this belief was visualized in some richly decorated manuscripts such as the aforementioned Gellone Sacramentary and the Sacramentary of Metz (c.869) by turning the T initial of that prayer into the tau-cross of a Crucifixion image.⁴⁴

Such figurative imagery corresponded to the views that Paschasius Radbertus expressed in his book on the nature of the eucharist written in 831–3, when he was a monk in the royal monastery of Corbie. Already as abbot of this abbey, he presented that work to the West Frankish king Charles the Bald (840–77) in 843/4, and revisited that topic in a later letter addressed to Frudegard, a monk of St Riquier, another West Frankish abbey to which Paschasius moved in voluntary exile in the 850s. The book apparently actively circulated between West Frankish royal and ecclesiastical centres, and received an indirect critical treatment from another monastic intellectual in Corbie, Ratramnus, probably in the mid-840s, as well as other responses in the 850s in what is now known as the Carolingian Eucharistic controversy.⁴⁵ For Paschasius, there was no doubt that during the mass, eucharistic bread and wine turned into the flesh and blood of the historical Christ, born of Mary. Ratramnus, by contrast, insisted that it was the spiritual body and blood of the historical Christ that existed under the veil of the eucharistic bread and wine, and that the spirit of Christ as found in the eucharist was 'the power of the divine word'.⁴⁶

⁴³ For an overview and related references, see Cavadini, *The Last Christology*; Chazelle, *The Crucified God*, pp. 52–74; Ganz, 'Theology', pp. 762–6.

⁴⁴ See Chazelle, *The Crucified God*, pp. 86–93. For the Crucifixion image in the Sacramentary of Metz, see Paris, BnF, Ms. lat. 1141, fol. 6v (Court School of Charles the Bald. c.869, KM, vol. 5, pp. 165–74).

⁴⁵ Paschasius Radbertus, *De corpore et sanguine Domini*, ed. Paulus, especially at pp. 27–31; Ratramnus of Corbie, *De corpore et sanguine Domini*, ed. van den Brink. For more details and references, see Ganz, *Corbie*, pp. 83–90; Chazelle, 'Figure'; Chazelle, *The Crucified God*, pp. 209–38; Kilmartin and Daly, *The Eucharist*, pp. 82–9; Appleby, '"Beautiful on the Cross"', pp. 18–24.

⁴⁶ Chazelle, 'Figure', p. 31 and note 94.

Ratramnus' work *On the Body and Blood of the Lord* was written on the request of Charles the Bald, and it must have soon become known at another monastery with close connections with the royal court, namely St Amand. After all, in the second half of Charles' reign, his son Carloman and archchancellor Gauzlin were listed as its abbots.⁴⁷ From the 850s to 870s, the scriptorium of St Amand produced luxurious copies of the Gregorian Sacramentary destined for various Frankish ecclesiastical centres.⁴⁸ The *Vere dignum* and *Te igitur* initials became the two major forms of decoration in these liturgical books, which introduced an important change in their presentation of the *Te igitur* initial, reminiscent of a similar change in the *IN principio* initial that occurred in the gospel-books produced in this scriptorium in the very same period. Similarly to the latter monogrammatic device, the *Te igitur* initial drawn in St Amand occupies the whole folio: the curved body of the letter E is crucified on the letter T representing a tau-cross (Fig. 8.6).⁴⁹ This initial invites various levels of Christological contemplation.



Fig. 8.6. *Te igitur* initial in Le Mans, BM, Ms. 77, fol. 9v–10r. © IRHT.

⁴⁷ For references, see Garipzanov, *The Symbolic Language*, pp. 89–90.

⁴⁸ For more details on these sacramentaries, see Deshusses, 'Chronologie', and Deshusses, 'Encore les sacramentaires'. On the School of St Amand, see Denoël, 'Saint-Amand'.

⁴⁹ The Sacramentary of Le Mans (c.851), Le Mans, BM, Ms. 77, fol. 9v; the Sacramentary of Chelles (c.855), New York, ML, Ms. G. 57, fol. 4v; the Sacramentary of Tournai (c.863), St Petersburg, National Library of Russia, Lat.Q.v.I.41, fol. 15v; the Sacramentary of St Denis (c.867), Paris, BnF, Ms. lat. 2290, fol. 20r; the Sacramentary of Noyon (c.869), Reims, BM, Ms. 213, fol. 13v; the Sacramentary of Sens (c.876–7), Stockholm, Kungliga Biblioteket, Ms. A 136, fol. 28r. See also a sacramentary fragment from St Amand now kept in Vienna, ÖNB, Cod. 958, fol. 5v (c.870). The same initial can also be seen in the liturgical manuscripts produced in scriptoria nearby in the second half of the ninth century and influenced by the style of St Amand, such as the Sacramentary

Firstly, it can be interpreted as an abstract Crucifixion image presenting the crucified Incarnate Word. One may thus argue that this image graphically refutes the alleged Adoptionist view that God was not crucified.⁵⁰ Secondly, the monogrammatic initial can be viewed as presenting, to a contemplative mind, the nature of divinity celebrated by the Mass. This initial *Te* refers to God the Father, but the monogram itself can also be perceived as comprising the first Latin initials of the name *Iesus*, I and E, placed on the tau-cross. Both personas of God are amalgamated in this monogram through Logos, as described in the well-known first verse of the Gospel of John. Thirdly, invented at the time of the Carolingian Eucharistic controversy, this initial probably also attempted to visualize the authoritative verdict on the nature of the eucharist in liturgical books that themselves operated as material signs of ecclesiastical authority; and this initial did so more or less in line with the argument of Ratramnus. The graphic device replaces the figural image of the Crucified Christ of the kind seen in the Gellone Sacramentary, with its emphasis on the flesh and blood of the historical Christ.⁵¹ Instead, the initial presents Christ as a crucified Word, leaning towards Ratramnus' interpretation of the divine word as the spiritual embodiment of Christ in the eucharist.

Finally, the *Te igitur* graphic device, as well as other monogrammatic initials designed by Carolingian clerical artists such as *Vere dignum*, *Liber generationis*, and *IN principio*, bear witness to the same cognitive mode of visual thinking that inspired the acclamatory monogram in the *Calendar of 354*—a late antique work copied in the Carolingian world.⁵² At the same time, the choice and configuration of letters in the latter monogram and the Carolingian monogrammatic devices were conditioned by different cultural mindsets. In the centuries separating the monogram of Valentinus from its Carolingian successors, such graphic devices evolved into an accepted visual attribute of authority, both secular and divine. In the very same capacity, monograms were also appropriated by the newly established Carolingian dynasty to project its royal authority across the Frankish world and beyond.

8.2. ROYAL, EPISCOPAL, AND PAPAL MONOGRAMS AS SIGNS OF AUTHORITY IN THE CAROLINGIAN WORLD

Royal monograms are noticeably absent in surviving numismatic and diplomatic evidence from Gaul dated to the late seventh and the first half of the eighth century. In decentralized late Merovingian silver coinage (the 670s–751), monograms were

of St Vaast of Arras (Cambrai, BM, Ms. 162, fol. 2v) and the Sacramentary of Stavelot (London, BL, Add. Ms. 16605, fol. 18v), the text of which is similar to the sacramentaries produced in Corbie and St Amand.

⁵⁰ On the criticism of this assertion by Agobard of Lyons in the early ninth century, see Ganz, 'Theology', pp. 765–6.

⁵¹ See Kendrick, *Animating the Letter*, pp. 84–6.

⁵² Salzman, *On Roman Time*, pp. 70–3; Burgess, 'The Chronograph'.

placed on rare occasions on the reverse of coins. These monogrammatic devices referred to the names of cities where mints were located (Fig. 7.11b), of ecclesiastical hierarchs in charge of monastic or episcopal mints or of their holy patrons, and of local autonomous secular leaders in southern Gaul. Such monogrammatic signs employed just several first letters of a name. The latter feature, as well as the fairly simple arrangement of such letters, suggests a declining knowledge of, and interest in, monograms in Gaul in those decades. In this perspective, it is hardly surprising that a royal monogram was absent from the royal charters of the first Carolingian king, Pippin the Short (751–68), as well as from contemporary Frankish silver coinage, which had been brought back under royal control early in his reign.⁵³

The appearance of the cruciform monogram of Pippin's son, Charlemagne (768–814), on his charters—with his earliest surviving charter dated to January 769—was, therefore, a radical departure from the late Merovingian tradition of royal symbols. Charlemagne's graphic sign of authority was designed by his clerical staff in the royal chancery led by chancellor Hithierius, who appropriated the cruciform shape typical of Latin monograms in papal Rome and Visigothic Spain as well as Greek monograms in contemporary Byzantium.⁵⁴ The four consonants of Charles' name, KAROLVS, were attached to the arms of the cross, with the three vowels assembled in the lozenge-shaped central part (Fig. 8.8a).

Whereas the cruciform shape of Charles' monogram indicates the adoption within his chancery of the visual symbolism of authority deriving from the Mediterranean world, the placement of a lozenge O at the middle of the royal sign is quite unique. A similar rhomb appears in the cruciform monograms of Narbonne and of Nemfidius of Marseilles, both placed on silver coins struck in southern Gaul in the early eighth century,⁵⁵ but it is less certain whether notaries in Charles' chancery knew of such coins some two generations later. It is more likely that the inventor/s of Charles' monograms borrowed a lozenge-shaped O from contemporary manuscript culture in the Frankish world, where it was used in incipit lines in the late Merovingian period.⁵⁶ In late sixth-century Gaul, Venantius Fortunatus employed the lozenge in combination with the sign of the cross as the main structural principle in one of his visual poems.⁵⁷ More generally, the lozenge motif featured in Mediterranean Christian art from late antiquity, and it also appeared in

⁵³ For further discussion and references, see Garipzanov, *The Symbolic Language*, pp. 169–72.

⁵⁴ For a detailed discussion of the origins of Charlemagne's monogram, its symbolic meanings, and probable designer, Hithierius, see Garipzanov, *The Symbolic Language*, pp. 173–7. See also a recent discussion by Schaller, 'Alte und neue Überlegungen', who argues that Charlemagne's monogram was designed by Fulrad, abbot of St Denis (pp. 169–73). For a critical response to Schaller's hypothesis and further argument in favour of Hithierius as the creator of Charlemagne's monogram, see Janet Nelson's discussion of Charlemagne's charter D.55 at <http://www.charlemagneurope.ac.uk/blog/charlemagnes-charter-d-55-13-january-769/> [accessed on 1 February 2017].

⁵⁵ Depeyrot, *Le numéraire mérovingien*, p. 149; and Prou, *Les monnaies mérovingiennes*, nos. 1548–55; MEC, p. 143.

⁵⁶ See e.g. a papyrus manuscript with Augustine's works currently divided between two libraries: Geneva, Bibliothèque Publique et Universitaire, Ms. lat. 16, fols 8r, 31v, 32r; and Paris, BnF, Ms. lat. 11641, fols 8v, 42v, 62v (probably Luxeuil, c.700, CLA, 7.**614).

⁵⁷ Ernst, *Carmen figuratum*, pp. 149–57.

Insular art from early on.⁵⁸ By the end of the eighth century, the lozenge could be employed in Insular manuscript decorations as a symbol of the Logos and as an aniconic representation of Christ, as illustrated by the luxurious Book of Kells.⁵⁹ The same Christological interpretation of a lozenge-shaped O can also explain the replacement of an initial O at the beginning of the name of Osius with the sign of the cross in a manuscript written by an Insular scribe in the first half of the eighth century, a manuscript that was at Cologne c.750.⁶⁰ The same intrinsic connection between the sign of the cross and the lozenge can be traced in the later court of Charlemagne, where Alcuin imitated Venantius Fortunatus in shaping his *carmen figuratum* on the Holy Cross by those two signs—this visual poem emphasized the transcendent powers of the Holy Cross through its role in the Passion of Jesus Christ.⁶¹ The two poetic lines encoded by this lozenge hailed the holy scarlet that shattered the shackles of the world and the signs (in plural) revealed to the world by new saving works.⁶²

It is however less certain that this symbolic interpretation of the lozenge sign familiar to Alcuin was known to the designer of Charlemagne's monogram in the latter's early chancery. If it was, the lozenge at the centre of the cruciform monogrammatic sign might have been intended to hint to erudite viewers cognizant of Christological visual symbolism at the Incarnate Word crucified on the Cross. The same symbolic message could have been communicated by the attachment of the letter R to the monogram's upper arm, which allowed an inquisitive viewer to discern a staurogram embedded into Charlemagne's graphic device. To an educated eye, such symbolic arrangements must therefore have impregnated the secular sign of authority with an arcane Christian signification. Regardless of whether or not Charles' monogram encoded such a complex Christian message, the fact that it incorporated the three vowel letters O, U, and A within its central lozenge indicates that, in the process of this monogrammatic invention, the local manuscript tradition of Frankish Gaul played as important a role as the Mediterranean tradition of cruciform monograms. After all, notaries in the early chancery of Charlemagne, and Hitherius in particular, probably knew and understood local writing conventions in both charters and manuscripts better than the scribal and diplomatic traditions of the British Isles and the Mediterranean world.

Charlemagne's graphic sign of authority became known in Carolingian scribal culture fairly soon, where it inspired both artistic imitations and direct copies, as in Codex Sangallensis 731.⁶³ This manuscript contains a collection of early medieval

⁵⁸ King, 'Diamonds'.

⁵⁹ O'Reilly, 'Patristic and Insular Traditions', p. 71; Tilghman, 'The Shape', pp. 292–3.

⁶⁰ Cologne, EDDB, Ms. 213, fol. 62v. It was first attributed to a Northumbrian scriptorium (CLA, 8.1163), but its Insular origin has been questioned in recent decades. Cologne has been suggested as a possible alternative; McKitterick, 'Knowledge of Cannon Law', pp. 109–15.

⁶¹ For more details on this poem, see Chazelle, *The Crucified God*, pp. 14–16, and Chapter 9.

⁶² 'Salve sancta rubens fregisti vincula mundi. // Signa valete novis reserata salutibus orbi.' *Alcuini carmina*, VI, ed. Dümmler, pp. 224–5. Later, Theodulf of Orléans used the same combination of the cross and lozenge in his visual poem (*Theodulfi carmina*, XXIII, ed. Dümmler, p. 482).

⁶³ The artistic imitations of Charlemagne's monogram are discussed in the next section of this chapter.

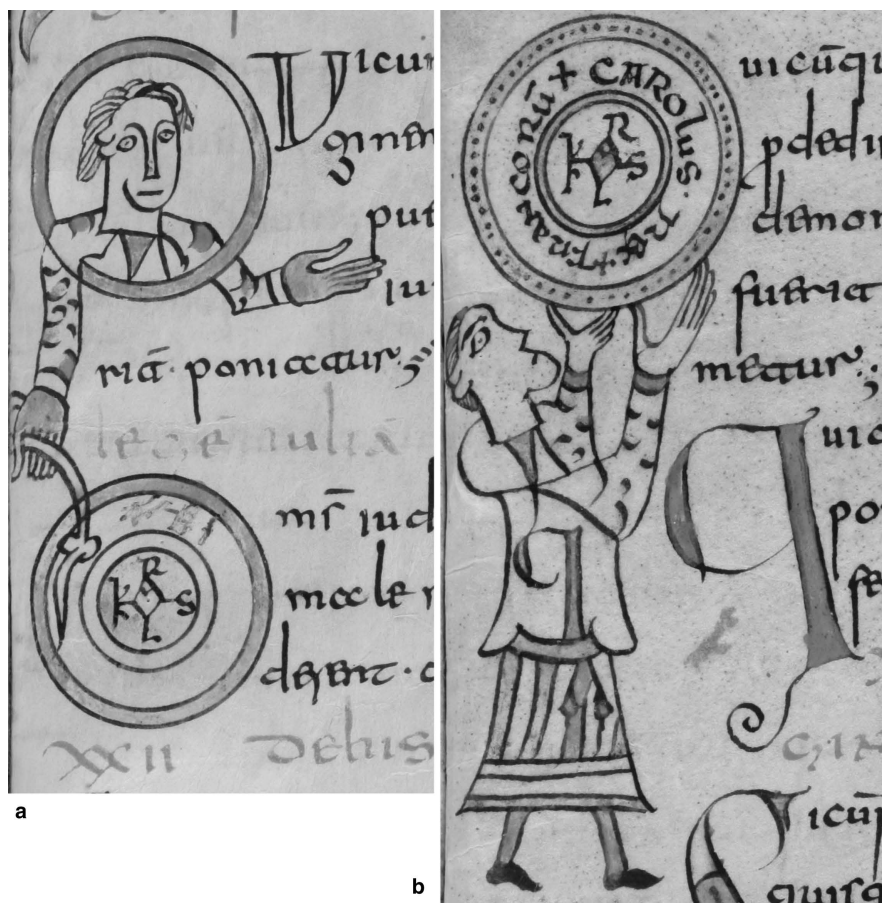


Fig. 8.7. Inhabited initials in St Gallen, SB, Cod. Sang. 731: a) p. 113; b) p. 111.

laws that a notary named Wandalgarius transcribed in 793, probably in western areas of modern Switzerland.⁶⁴ On page 113, an initial O serves as a frame for the image of what looks like a seal with Charlemagne's monogram at the centre (Fig. 8.7a). Wandalgarius obviously depicts a graphic sign he was familiar with, and he consciously employs it to introduce an adhortation to all the judges (*Omnes iudicis sciant*, 'All the judges should know') not to trespass the law so that the chapter in question (*The Breviary of Alaric*, IX. 21) looks as if it were a royal charter with a circular royal seal attached to it. On page 111, he presents another sample of Charlemagne's monogram, this time on his newly introduced silver penny framed by an initial Q (Fig. 8.7b). This new type of coinage was introduced in 792/3, and Charlemagne's monogram became its new recognizable visual

⁶⁴ St Gallen, SB, Cod. Sang. 731; CLA, 7.950.

attribute, reaching out across social strata. With this monogrammatic display of authority, the Carolingian king distinguished his new silver coins circulating in the second half of his reign (792/3–814) from all the coins of his seventh- and eighth-century Frankish predecessors.⁶⁵ Similarly to his charters, he ‘sealed’, as it were, each of his coins with a graphic royal sign, the form of which imbued them with transcendent power—thus emphasizing their authoritative nature to the people handling these tiny metal objects in Gaul and northern Italy. Coin users most likely understood this message, and so did Wandalgarius, who drew the image of Charlemagne’s monogrammed penny inside an initial to begin the legal chapter that threatened forgers of fake coins, and emphasized the authoritative nature of the new royal coinage.

In the late eighth century, Charlemagne’s monogram most likely served as a source of inspiration not only for scribes copying manuscripts but also for notaries of his royal sons reigning over their respective sub-kingdoms. This can be deduced from a unique charter of Louis the Pious that the notary Hildigarius wrote at his Aquitanian court in 794. Hildigarius marked this document with the cruciform monogram of Louis clearly styled after the monogrammatic sign of authority of his reigning father, including its characteristic O–V–A lozenge.⁶⁶ The situation changed in the early ninth century when the chancery of Louis the Pious, led by Helisachar from 808 to 819, designed a new H-based monogram for Louis inspired by the late antique box monogram of Theodosius II. It appears first on Aquitanian royal charters between 808 and 814, and its slightly modified form was taken over by the chancery in Aachen after Louis replaced Charlemagne at the imperial throne early in 814 (Fig. 8.8b–c). The imitation of the monogrammatic symbol of authority of an exemplary Christian emperor, Theodosius II, by a new *imperator Christianus*, Louis the Pious, was not especially surprising in light of the popularity of late Roman symbolism at the imperial court in Aachen at the end of Charlemagne’s rule and during the reign of Louis (814–40). This diplomatic change demonstrated to the noble recipients of Louis’ charters the new perception of the Carolingian polity propagated by the imperial court, whereby the Frankish empire was perceived as a legitimate successor of the Christian Roman empire in the Latin West.⁶⁷ In the 820s and 830s, the chanceries of sons of Louis the Pious, Lothar I and Pippin I of Aquitaine, modelled their box monograms after the monogrammatic sign of their imperial father, thus emphasizing dynastic continuity by graphic means (Fig. 8.8d–e). This process of visual imitation was especially apparent in the structure of Pippin I’s graphic sign, whose name lacked

⁶⁵ For a detailed discussion of these images, the codex and its scribe, and Charlemagne’s introduction of the new coinage in 792/3, see Garipzanov, ‘Regensburg’, and Garipzanov, *The Symbolic Language*, pp. 178–81.

⁶⁶ DK, vol. 2, no. XXVIII; ChLA, vol. 19, no. 681. For details of this charter and the monogram inscribed on it, see Dickau, ‘Studien’, pp. 25–31; Mersiowsky, ‘Graphische Symbole’, p. 351; and Worm, *Karolingische Rekognitionszeichen*, vol. 1, p. 46.

⁶⁷ DK, vol. 2, nos. I–XXVII, XXVIII–LI. For a more technical discussion of Louis’ box monogram, its similarity to Theodosius II’s graphic symbol of authority, and the former’s relation to the dynamic political culture of the imperial court, see Garipzanov, *The Symbolic Language*, pp. 182–4.

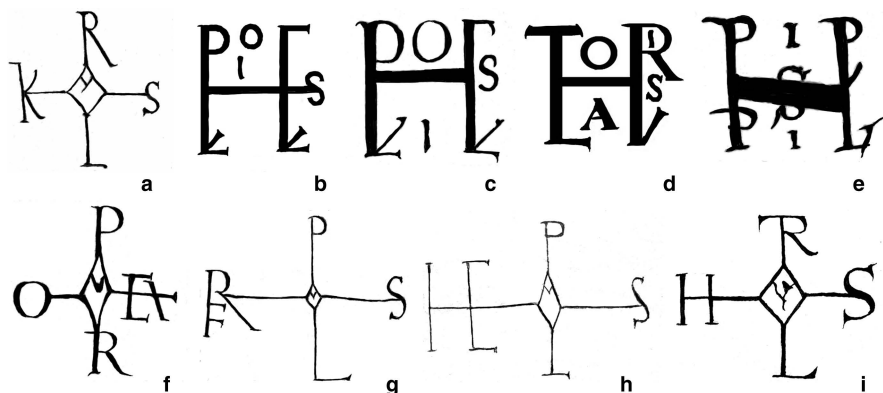


Fig. 8.8. Carolingian diplomatic monograms, based on DK: a) of Charlemagne; b) of Louis the Pious in Aquitaine (808–14); c) of Louis the Pious in Aachen (814–40); d) of Lothar I; e) of Pippin I of Aquitaine; f) of Odo; g) of Rudolf; h) of Louis IV; i) Lothar III.

a letter H. As a result, his monogram was structured by a letter N, the central bar of which was often drawn nearly horizontal to resemble an H.

This 'reinvention' of the late antique box monogram in Carolingian scribal culture in the early ninth century can also be traced in manuscripts—for example, in the copy of Jerome's commentaries on Jeremiah written by the scribe Agambertus in 806, probably in the abbey of Fleury.⁶⁸ Virtually identical box monograms appear in two different places: one after the explicit line of Book 5 (fol. 150v) and the other in the colophon of the manuscript which is splashed with various scribal devices and scripts with the clear intent to impress the codex's clerical recipient, and to confirm the scribe's proficiency in his art to any educated viewer (fol. 181v; Fig. 8.9). The colophon starts with the box monogram of the commissioner followed by Agambertus' name and an invocation, all written with a peculiar mixture of Greek letters with characters of Aethicus Ister's alphabet and so-called 'Marcomannic' runes.⁶⁹ These lines are followed by a dating clause in Latin referring to the sixth year of Charlemagne's imperial reign and detailing his imperial *intitulatio* as it was recorded in some concurrent capitularies and imperial letters, thus indicating Agambertus' familiarity with contemporary diplomatic practices. A cryptic exhortation to the reader to pray for the scribe appears after the dating clause; each vowel is replaced with a following consonant of the Latin alphabet, a cryptographic method well known to educated Carolingian scribes.⁷⁰ The lower part of the page is filled with classical and Christian 'magical' palindromes like the SATOR, AMOR, and AMEN squares, anagrams of the scribe's name, one of which is arranged in the form of a cross. The commissioner's monogram has in its

⁶⁸ Valenciennes, BM, Ms. 59; *Katalog*, no. 6330.

⁶⁹ 'N. fieri ordinavit; Agambertus fecit; deo gratias semper domine, amen.' On the popularity of these alphabets in Carolingian manuscript culture around the turn of the ninth century, see section 8.3.

⁷⁰ 'Qui legis, ora pro scriptore, ut mereas habere deum protectorem.'

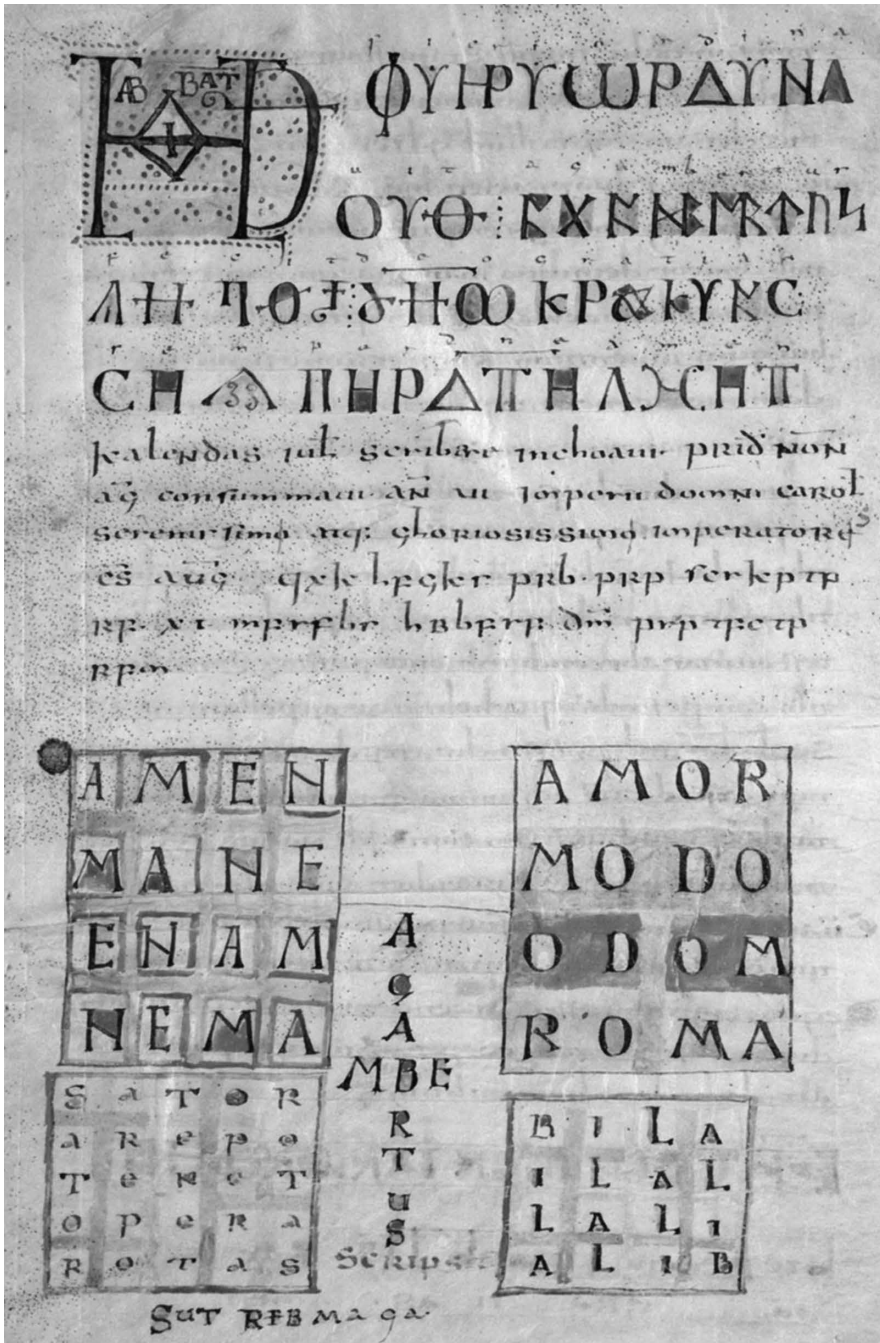


Fig. 8.9. Scribal colophon in Valenciennes, BM, Ms. 59, fol. 181v. © IRHT.

field *abbat.*, probably presenting the abbreviated title *abbatissa* (abbess). René Derolez and Bernhard Bischoff have suggested that the monogram encodes one of two female names, *Hlottildis* or *Theodildis*.⁷¹ Yet the monogram in question lacks the letter S, which means that the suggested decoding is still highly hypothetical.

While the encoded name remains an enigma, its shape is not. It is close to the official monograms of both Carolingian emperors, Charlemagne and Louis the Pious, in borrowing the central lozenge from the former's sign and sharing a box structure with the latter's graphic device. With this graphic sign, Adalbertus visually emphasized the position of authority held by the manuscript's recipient, the point underscored by the similarity of that monogrammatic name to the graphic signs of Carolingian rulers employed in contemporary diplomas.

In a similar fashion, the N-based monogram of the powerful abbot Benedict of Aniane (BENEDICTO) appears in his *Codex regularum*, which was possibly copied at Kornelimünster near Aachen soon after its foundation in 814, before the manuscript was brought to St Maximin in Trier later in the first half of the ninth century (Fig. 8.10a).⁷² Although this monogram decorates the authorial humble address to the book's readers, its box shape contradicts this rhetorical topos of humility by means of graphicacy—thus visualizing the authority of the closest clerical advisor to the Carolingian emperor Louis the Pious.

In the period of fierce dynastic competition after 840 following the fragmentation of the Carolingian empire, royal monograms became a graphic tool of visual legitimation. As a result, Carolingian chanceries tended to adopt the diplomatic monograms of earlier rulers for their later namesakes, such as Louis the German, Charles the Bald, Lothar II, Louis II, and Pippin II, or to adapt the traditional graphic design for new monogrammatic forms.⁷³ In this later period, the monograms of previous kings and emperors were appreciated as visible tokens of dynastic continuity—legitimizing each new Carolingian ruler—and they were copied with little or no change to their design. Carolingian monograms thus became graphic devices with a hundred-year-long cultural history, worthy of being transcribed in codices produced in close proximity to royal palaces. One such example is a personal reference handbook (*vade mecum*) of Grimalt, abbot of St Gall from 841 to 872, who was once chaplain at the court of Louis the Pious (833) and subsequently served as chancellor and archchaplain of Louis the German.⁷⁴ On page 51 of this miscellany written by as many as forty different hands, four contemporary Carolingian royal monograms were added at the end of the *Notitia Galliarum*, a text describing provinces of Gaul (Fig. 8.10b). As argued by Bischoff, this section of the codex was copied in Regensburg when Grimalt served there at the royal court of Louis the German.⁷⁵

⁷¹ Derolez, *Runica manuscripta*, p. 406; Bischoff, 'Manuscripts', p. 32, note 53c. See also McKitterick, *The Carolingians*, p. 256.

⁷² Munich, BSB, Clm. 28118, fol. 18r; Hauke, *Katalog*, p. 7.

⁷³ For a discussion of these diplomatic monograms and for relevant bibliography, see Garipzanov, *The Symbolic Language*, pp. 185–8 and 194.

⁷⁴ St Gallen, SB, Cod. Sang. 397; *Katalog*, no. 5741; McKitterick, *The Carolingians*, pp. 183–4.

⁷⁵ 'Bücher', pp. 201–11.



Fig. 8.10. a) Monogram of Benedict of Aniane in Munich, BSB, Clm. 28118, fol. 18r; b) East Frankish diplomatic monograms in St Gallen, SB, Cod. Sang. 397, p. 51; c) monograms of Bishop Hanto in Munich, BSB, Clm. 23631, fol. 245r.

This fact explains the presence in this manuscript of monogrammatic signs of that king (identical to Louis the Pious' box monogram, *Hludovicus*) and his sons Carloman (in two versions, namely *Karlomannus* and *Karlmannus*, imitating the box structure of his father's monogram), Louis the Younger (identical to his father's and grandfather's), and Charles the Fat (identical to Charlemagne's famous sign of authority, *Karolus*). These royal signs were thus included in a miscellaneous compendium of practical knowledge, probably in the 860s, as material useful for a high-status cleric running a royal chancery.

With the fame of Charlemagne as an exemplary Carolingian ruler growing from the mid-ninth century onwards, many of his heirs named after him not only borrowed his cruciform monogram for diplomatic usage but also employed it on their coinage. Charles the Bald (840–77) started this practice, which was followed by later Carolingian namesakes such as Charles the Fat (881–7) and Charles the Simple (897–922). Charlemagne's monogram thus gradually became a traditional graphic symbol of royal authority easily recognizable by most people, even if the vast majority of them were scarcely able to decipher its

linguistic content.⁷⁶ The visual appeal of Charlemagne's monogram became especially noticeable in West Francia/France, where chanceries imitated its cruciform shape and central lozenge in every new royal monogram designed in the late ninth and tenth centuries. When dynastic outsiders to the Carolingian family, such as Odo (888–98) or Rudolf (923–36), ascended against all the odds to the throne of West Francia, their new royal monograms (ODO REX and RUDOLFUS) followed the gist of Charlemagne's cruciform graphic device and incorporated the latter's central lozenge including its letter A. This letter absent in their names was included for its visual (not phonetic) qualities—namely to make their graphic signs of authority resemble, as closely as possible, the graphic sign of the great Charles (Fig. 8.8f–g).⁷⁷ Even later Carolingians with traditional names such as Louis IV (936–54) or Lothar III (954–86) had their diplomatic monograms styled not after their earlier royal namesakes, but after the graphic sign of authority designed for Charlemagne two hundred years earlier (Fig. 8.8h–i).⁷⁸ This appeal of Charlemagne's monogram extended in West Francia beyond diplomatic culture. Thus, for example, a book of commentaries on Tironian notes, which was produced in Reims around the turn of the tenth century, employed an easily recognizable lozenge-based cruciform device for two identical monograms encoding the Italian place name *Puteoli* at the beginning of Book 5.⁷⁹

The monogrammatic devices of Carolingian rulers highlight another significant feature of Carolingian personal monograms, which made them strikingly different from their late antique predecessors. The former took the nominative case, whereas the latter the genitive or, later, the dative of possession or association. This grammatical change mirrored a profoundly different usage of personal monograms in the Latin West from the mid-eighth century onwards. Unlike in late antiquity, personal monograms in the Carolingian world did not appear on dress accessories or luxurious objects of personal use, as marks of elevated status for people possessing them or authorizing their usage. In this culture fixated on the written text and its authoritative nature, where luxurious codices and royal charters were appreciated for their symbolic value in social interaction,⁸⁰ monograms were predominantly drawn on parchment to underscore the authority of people whose names were represented in a monogrammatic form. In this function, personal monograms became attractive graphic devices not only for kings and abbots but also for Carolingians bishops, such as Charlemagne's confidant and a prominent figure of authority in early Carolingian Bavaria, Arn of Salzburg (bishop from 784–98 and archbishop

⁷⁶ For more details and references, see Garipzanov, *The Symbolic Language*, pp. 194–8. For their diplomatic monograms, see DK, vols 3–5 (for Charles the Bald), vol. 6, nos. I–III, X–XXIV, vol. 7, nos. I–X, XX–XXVII (for Charles the Fat and Charles the Simple).

⁷⁷ DK, vol. 6, nos. IV–IX; vol. 7, nos. XI–XIX (for Odo); vol. 8, nos. I–III (for Rudolf).

⁷⁸ DK, vol. 8, nos. IV–X (for Louis IV), nos. XI–XIV (for Lothar III). For other examples of the symbolic importance attributed to the visual features of late Carolingian royal diplomas, see Koziol, *The Politics*.

⁷⁹ Leiden, Universiteitsbibliotheek, VLO 94, fols 114v–r; *Katalog*, no. 2256.

⁸⁰ See e.g. McKitterick, *The Carolingians*, pp. 155–64.

from 798–821).⁸¹ The text of Jerome's commentaries on the Gospel of Matthew originating from St Amand, where Bishop Arn was abbot from 782, concludes with a monogrammatic reference to the scribe's superior—with an initial A on the top of a cross marking Arn's name and the following cruciform monogram EPCS rendering his title (*episcopus*).⁸² In a similar manner, Hanto, bishop of Augsburg (807–16) in nearby Swabia, had two cruciform monograms of his personal name and title (*Hanto episcobus*) drawn at the end of the luxurious Purple Gospels (Fig. 8.10c).⁸³ Another 'living Word of God', the gospel-book produced in Lorsch in 826–38, presents a more advanced form of monogrammatic display, where five golden monograms flank the final part of Jerome's letter to Pope Damasus preceding the Gospel tables and encode another message of episcopal authority by Bishop Folcwich of Worms: 'Bishop Folcwich has ordered Valhramus to write [this manuscript]' ('Folcvic episc[opus] scrib[ere] iussit Valhr[am]u[m]'), Fig. 8.11).⁸⁴ The closest parallels to such encoding of the whole sentence in a set of cruciform monograms are attested in contemporary Byzantine monuments.⁸⁵ With active diplomatic exchanges between the Carolingian world and Byzantium in the first third of the ninth century, the latter Byzantine practice was probably known to some educated clerics with contacts at the imperial court of Louis the Pious in Aachen, where a monk from Lorsch, Gerward, served as librarian sometime between 814 and 828.⁸⁶

The use of monograms as graphic signs of authority was more widespread in northern and central Italy, due to both a better preservation of the late antique monogrammatic tradition and a much closer proximity to the Byzantine world. In the Carolingian period, monograms were drawn, carved, and stamped on a wider range of media in Italy than they were in the north, which suggests that the ability to encode and decode information by means of monograms was better known to the south of the Alps than in the Frankish world. In the late eighth century, unique monograms of Charlemagne were designed and placed on the coin issues of the Lombard duchy of Benevento and the mint of Ravenna. Whereas in Ravenna die-carvers transcribed his monogram in Greek and arranged letters in a box shape, thus mixing late Roman and Byzantine traditions in this process (Fig. 8.12a), in Benevento the die designer preserved the cruciform structure of Charles' graphic sign.⁸⁷ In the latter mint, the sign of the cross similarly structured personal monograms of Lombard dukes and the title monogram of Louis II of Italy on their silver coins struck in the ninth century. It is noteworthy that the first numismatic monogram of Beneventan dukes, that of Sico (817–32) adopted not only a cruciform shape but also the central lozenge of Charlemagne's device, even though the latter

⁸¹ Brown, *Unjust Seizure*, pp. 102–23.

⁸² 'In dei nomine A[rn] episcopus fieri iussit': Stuttgart, Württembergische Landesbibliothek, Cod. theol. et phil. 2° 208, fols 156v–157r; Bischoff, *Die südostdeutschen Schreibschulen*, vol. 2, p. 104.

⁸³ Munich, BSB, Clm. 23631, fol. 245r; *Katalog*, no. 3339; Bischoff, 'Manuscripts', p. 39.

⁸⁴ Los Angeles, J. Paul Getty Museum, Ms. Ludwig II 1, fol. 3v; *Katalog*, no. 2511; Bischoff, 'Court Library', p. 84; Bischoff, *Die Abtei*, pp. 44–7 and 84, no. 64.

⁸⁵ For a similar set of cruciform monograms produced in Lorsch a few decades earlier, see section 8.3.

⁸⁶ Bischoff, 'The Court Library', pp. 78–9; McKitterick, *The Carolingians*, pp. 190–1.

⁸⁷ For more details, see Garipzanov, *The Symbolic Language*, pp. 180–1.

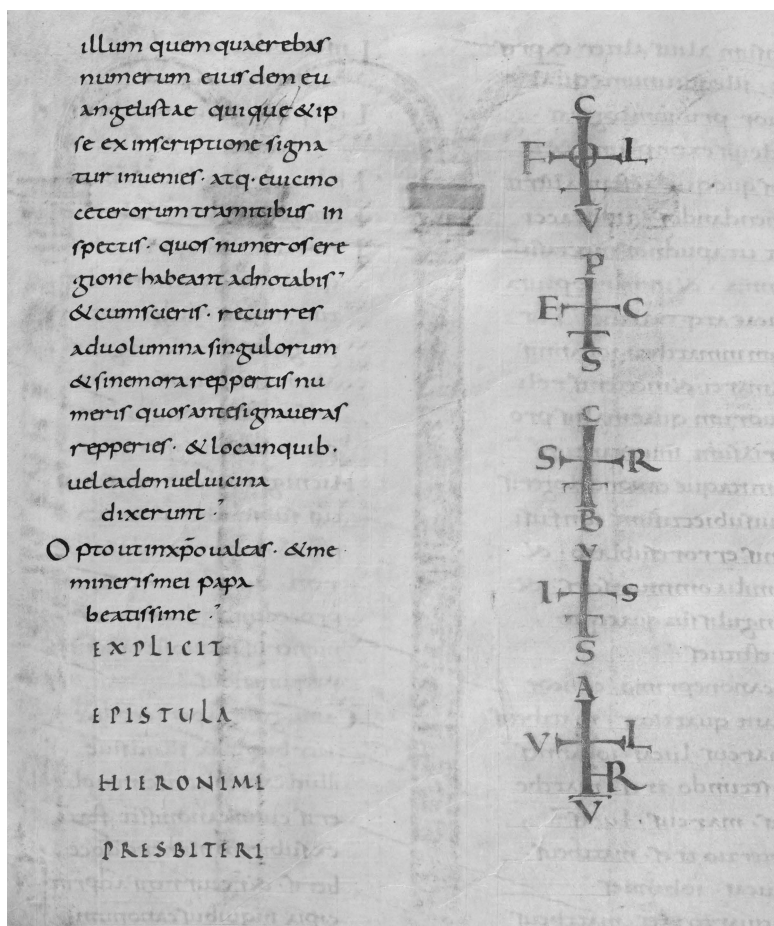


Fig. 8.11. Introductory monograms in Los Angeles, J. Paul Getty Museum, Ms. Ludwig II 1, fol. 3v.

graphic element carried no phonetic value (Fig. 8.12b). Similar to diplomatic monograms of later Carolingian kings, the lozenge was thus imitated as a purely symbolic element, invoking for its viewers the graphic sign of the most powerful political figure in late eighth and early ninth-century Western Europe.

Furthermore, the papal-imperial coinage of the ninth century employed a cruciform shape for monogrammatic titles *pius* and *imperator* accompanying the names of Carolingian emperors, as well as for the mint name of ROMA (Fig. 8.12c). Yet the vast majority of papal personal monograms that became typical of the coinage of Rome from the pontificate of Nicholas I (858–67) onwards followed the traditional silhouette of late antique box monograms (Fig. 8.12d),⁸⁸ a regular

⁸⁸ For more details, see Garipzanov, *The Symbolic Language*, pp. 188–93; MEC, pp. 71–2, 264–5, nos. 1048–64 and 1103–21.

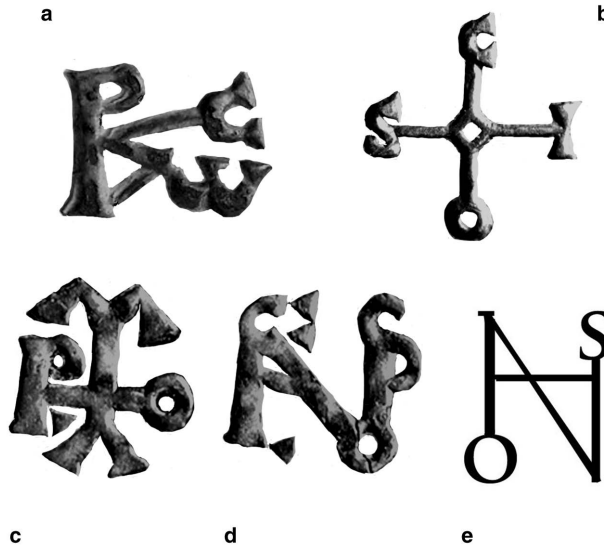


Fig. 8.12. a) Greek monogram of Charlemagne on Ravennate coins (792/3–814); b) monogram of Duke Sico on Beneventan coins; c) ROMA monogram on ninth-century papal coins; d) monogram of Pope Nicholas I (858–67) on papal coinage; e) epistolary monogram of Bishop John (a. 827/8) from ChLA, vol. 58, no. 14.

feature of concurrent papal monograms in other media, as well as Italian episcopal monograms of the eighth and ninth century in general.

Unlike in Frankish Gaul, the monogrammatic signs of Italian ecclesiastical hierarchs were displayed not only on parchment—as in a letter written in Lucca in 827/8, where the name of its addressee, Bishop John, is encoded with a traditional box monogram (Fig. 8.12e)⁸⁹—but also on stone. An earlier example of such usage is the monogram of Bishop Lopicensus (c.749–85) on a fragmentary funerary epitaph from Modena (Fig. 8.13).⁹⁰ In this graphic sign of episcopal authority built around the letter N, the letters C and S are attached to the upper ends of the N's vertical bars in a manner similar to box monograms produced in late antique Rome and northern Italy.

A more systematic revival of the late antique monogrammatic tradition took place in papal Rome from the pontificate of Paschal I (817–24), which was hardly accidental considering that he has been identified as the first in the line of ninth-century popes asserting papal authority vis-à-vis Carolingian rulers and lay aristocracy.⁹¹ Paschal I's impressive program of architectural restoration included three Roman churches entirely rebuilt during his pontificate, namely Santa Cecilia in Trastevere, Santa Maria in Domnica, and Santa Prassede, where he monumentalized

⁸⁹ For further details, see Garipzanov, *The Symbolic Language*, p. 193.

⁹⁰ Gray, 'The Paleography', p. 71, no. 36; Koch, *Innschriftenpaläographie*, p. 81.

⁹¹ For a detailed discussion, see Goodson, *Rome*.



Fig. 8.13. Fragmentary funerary epitaph of Bishop Lopicensus from Modena. Norwegian Institute in Rome, H. P. L'Orange Photo Archive.

his achievement not only by means of dedicatory inscriptions and figurative imagery, but also with the H-based monogram of his name which was added to mosaics at the apex of the apse and sometimes of the apsidal arch of each church (Fig. 8.14).⁹² As Caroline Goodson emphasizes, these 'churches were the places of papal authority, an authority constructed by ceremony, material splendour and spiritual presence',⁹³ and Paschal's graphic sign of authority, itself reminiscent of the box monogram of Louis the Pious, visualized this point to any believer standing in their naves and approaching their high altars during the liturgy. The papal monogram was displayed at the locations that had been traditionally reserved for christograms such as the chi-rho or iota-chi (Fig. 7.20), by the side of divine personages such as Jesus Christ, the Lamb of God, and the Virgin Mary. The closest earlier parallels to Paschal's monogrammatic usage were the episcopal monograms in the sixth-century archiepiscopal chapel in Ravenna (Fig. 6.17), which probably served as the direct source of inspiration for Paschal. As in the earlier case, Paschal's monograms were embedded into the sacred visual space of each church, and undoubtedly underscored the transcendent sources of his pontifical authority.

In the following years, Pope Gregory IV (827–44) imitated Paschal's monumental display of pontifical authority by having his own graphic sign placed inside a newly built church of San Marco, at the top of the apsidal mosaic between the two portraits of Jesus. But unlike Paschal's monogram of late antique style, Gregory's sign represented a combination of the debased cruciform monogram *papa* and his

⁹² Gray, 'The Paleography', pp. 97 and 100.

⁹³ Goodson, *Rome*, p. 4.



Fig. 8.14. Monograms of Pope Paschal I in Santa Prassede, Rome.

name *Gregorii* written in two lines. More elegant are the monograms that appear on the gigantic epigraphic *tabula ansata* with the inscription produced for public display and recording the foundation of Leopolis (twelve miles from Civitavecchia) by Leo IV in 854.⁹⁴ A traditional late antique monogram LEONIS was carved on the left handle of the *tabula ansata*, whereas the right handle presented a newly invented cruciform monogram PAPAE (Fig. 8.15a–b). This *tabula* was most likely placed over the main gateway to the city, and the papal monograms as high as three lines of the text in between communicated the authority of the founding pope to every passer-by. The public visibility of such papal monumental monograms in Rome and its vicinity from the 810s to 850s provides a wider material context to the aforementioned popularity of papal monogrammatic signs of a late antique style on papal-imperial coinage from the mid-ninth century onwards.

This *renovatio* of the late antique box monogram as a sign of ecclesiastical authority was not limited to mid-ninth-century papal Rome, but was also revived in the North Adriatic. Thus, when Bishop Handegis (857–62) renovated the cathedral of Pola in Istria in 857, he had it embellished with a plaque, probably a door lintel, where an inscription recording his achievement is surmounted with a

⁹⁴ Gray, 'The Paleography', p. 102.



a



b

Fig. 8.15. Monograms of Pope Leo IV on epigraphic *tabula ansata* from Civitavecchia (a. 854): a) left side; b) right side. Norwegian Institute in Rome, H. P. L'Orange Photo Archive.



Fig. 8.16. Monogram of Bishop Handegis from the Cathedral of Pola. Norwegian Institute in Rome, H. P. L'Orange Photo Archive.

box monogram of his name and episcopal title executed in a late antique style and flanked by two imperial Roman eagles (Fig. 8.16).⁹⁵

Contacts between the see of Canterbury and papal Rome must also have contributed to the appearance of urban box monograms on coins issued at the mint of the archbishops of Canterbury from the 810s onwards (Fig. 8.17a). This innovation was quite unique for Anglo-Saxon England where monograms were rarely employed during the early Middle Ages. A reverse type with an urban box monogram was briefly employed at the mint of London later, during the reign of Alfred the Great (in 886/7), but its peculiar structure suggests that an influence from concurrent monogrammatic initials probably played a decisive role in its design (Fig. 8.17b).⁹⁶ Furthermore, unlike on the Continent, monograms were also virtually absent in Anglo-Saxon manuscript culture, with the *Vespasian Psalter* providing the only known exception. Considering the above numismatic monograms of Canterbury, it is perhaps not surprising that this early eighth-century luxurious manuscript was produced in this city or nearby, and in the ninth century two peculiar box monograms were added inside this codex on the two sides of a vellum patch fixing one of its holes (Fig. 8.17c–d).⁹⁷ The red colour of these monograms and their large size—they are as high as four lines of the surrounding text written in black ink—clearly demonstrates the significance of these graphic devices for both their producers and viewers. Yet their unique forms were strikingly different from the monograms executed in Carolingian Francia and the lack of a specific context for their addition makes it virtually impossible to decode them.⁹⁸ At the same

⁹⁵ Marušić, *Spätantike und byzantinische Pula*, p. 57; Maracović and Jurković, “Signatures”, p. 360. A similar monogram was probably also carved on a ciborium from Pola (Maracović and Jurković, “Signatures”, note 13).

⁹⁶ MEC, pp. 288–90 and 313.

⁹⁷ London, BL, Cotton Ms. Vespasian A. I., fols 153r–v; CLA, 1.193; *The Vespasian Psalter*, ed. Wright, pp. 31–2 and 79.

⁹⁸ David Wright suggested that the first monogram included the word *abba* and the second the title *rex*: *The Vespasian Psalter*, p. 32.

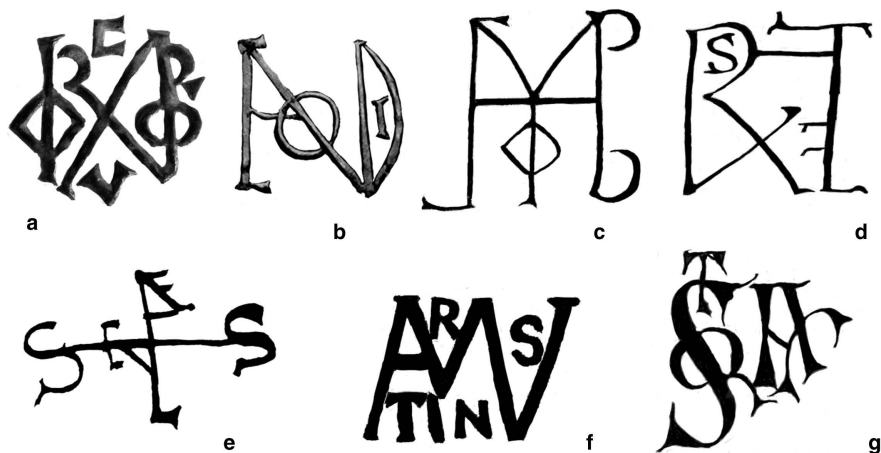


Fig. 8.17. a) urban monogram (*Dorobernia civitas*) on the pennies of Canterbury during the episcopate of Archbishop Wulfred (805–32); b) urban monogram of London on pennies of Alfred the Great; c–d) box monograms from London, BL, Cotton Ms. Vespasian A. I., fols 153r–v; e) monogram of Sendelenus from Lyons, BM, Ms. 452, fol. 276r; f) monogram of Martinus from Paris, BnF, Ms. lat. 1603, fol. 192r; g) monogrammatic initial of STORAX from Paris, BnF, Ms. lat. 9332, fol. 246v.

time, the similarity of their slender silhouettes to the early urban monogram of Canterbury from the 810s (Fig. 8.17a) and the identical forms of a lozenge O and an open R suggest common origins for the graphic devices in the two media.

8.3. A MONOGRAMMATIC REVIVAL IN CAROLINGIAN MANUSCRIPT CULTURE AND *DE INVENTIONE LITTERARUM*

The increasing use of monograms in early Carolingian scribal culture as signs of authority for lay rulers and ecclesiastical hierarchs also affected clerics of lower status, who emulated their superiors by designing and drawing their own monograms in manuscripts. One of the earliest cases can be found in the late antique manuscript with Hilary of Poitiers' commentaries on Psalms, where a certain Sendelenus added his name and drew his personal cruciform monogram in the upper margin of fol. 276r (Fig. 8.17e), probably in the last third of the eighth century.⁹⁹ The arrangement of letters in Sendelenus' graphic device follows the same directions as in Charlemagne's monogram—starting at the left arm (SEN), then proceeding to the upper arm (DE), followed by a movement at the lower arm (LENV), and finishing at the end of the right arm (S). Furthermore, Sendelenus' and Charlemagne's monograms similarly place the letters L and S at the end of the

⁹⁹ Lyons, BM, Ms. 452 (Italy or Lyons, s. V ex.); CLA, 6.775.

lower and right arms respectively. These graphic features indicate that Sendelenus was probably familiar with Charlemagne's sign of authority and imitated its graphic structure while designing his own monogram.

Sendelenus' urge to inscribe a personal monogram on a parchment leaf was not unique in the early Carolingian period. For example, a scribal monogram appears in the colophon of the manuscript containing the Canons and liturgical miscellanea, which was written in north-eastern France around the turn of the ninth century. It displays the box monogram of the scribe (*Martinus*, Fig. 8.17f) followed by the word *subscripsi* ('I have signed'),¹⁰⁰ thus demonstrating the scribe's mastery of monogrammatic design to the book's readers. Furthermore, another scribe drew his own monogram (UNICAR) in a theological compilation written in the late eighth century.¹⁰¹ The latter codex was made at the same scribal centre that produced a miscellany of classical texts around the turn of the ninth century, including the Latin translation of Dioscorides' *De materia medica*. In late antique Greek copies of this manuscript, each medical herb was illustrated with a drawing.¹⁰² Unlike their late antique forerunners, the producers of the Frankish copy prioritized the graphic sign over the visual image. The Frankish Dioscorides lacks late antique illustrations, but provides some chapters with peculiar monogrammatic devices visualizing the name of an entry's medical material (Fig. 8.17g).¹⁰³ Bernhard Bischoff attributed this manuscript to Fleury, the abbey in which the aforementioned Agambertus drew the monogram of a commissioner in 806. Taken together, these examples affiliated with Fleury demonstrate that monograms and monogram-like forms entered scribal repertoire in this prominent Carolingian abbey under the abbacy of Theodulf, bishop of Orléans (788–821) and one of the most influential clerics at Charlemagne's court in the second half of the latter's reign.

The same desire to assert scribal prowess by means of monogrammatic devices can be seen in the earliest surviving text of Dares Phrygius' *De excidio Troiae historia*, copied in another Frankish monastery with close connections to the Carolingian court, Lorsch, under the abbacy of Richbod (784–804), a former student of Alcuin at Charlemagne's court.¹⁰⁴ On some pages, cruciform monogrammatic devices appear in the external side margins. Most of them perished when the external edge of this manuscript was cut off at a later time, but their traces are still visible on fols 77v and 80v. A chain of four cruciform devices with capital letters have survived mostly intact only on fol. 80r (Fig. 8.18): ECC[E] QUOMOD[O] TROIA CAPTA EST ('Look here how Troy was captured'). The monogrammatic devices accompany chapters 39–40 describing the treachery that led to the capture of Troy, which suggests that cruciform monograms were drawn in margins as the graphic

¹⁰⁰ Paris, BnF, Ms. lat. 1603, fol. 192r; CLA, 5.531.

¹⁰¹ Chartres, BM, Ms. 41 (3), fol. 52r; CLA, 6.746. The manuscript perished in 1944, and no details of the shape and structure of this monogram have been recorded.

¹⁰² Vienna, ÖNB, Cod. Med. gr. 1; Naples, Biblioteca Nazionale di Napoli, Ms. ex-Vind. Gr. 1.

¹⁰³ Paris, BnF, Ms. lat. 9332, fols 245v, 246r–v, 256r, 291r–92r, 293v, 295v, 296v; *Katalog*, no. 4569.

¹⁰⁴ Paris, BnF, Ms. lat. 7906, fols 59–88; CLA, 12.1744; *Katalog*, no. 4512; Bischoff, 'Libraries', p. 95; Reimitz, 'Transformations', pp. 274–6. For a detailed discussion of this text and of the manuscript containing it, see Yavuz, *Transmission*, pp. 50–71 and 218–31.

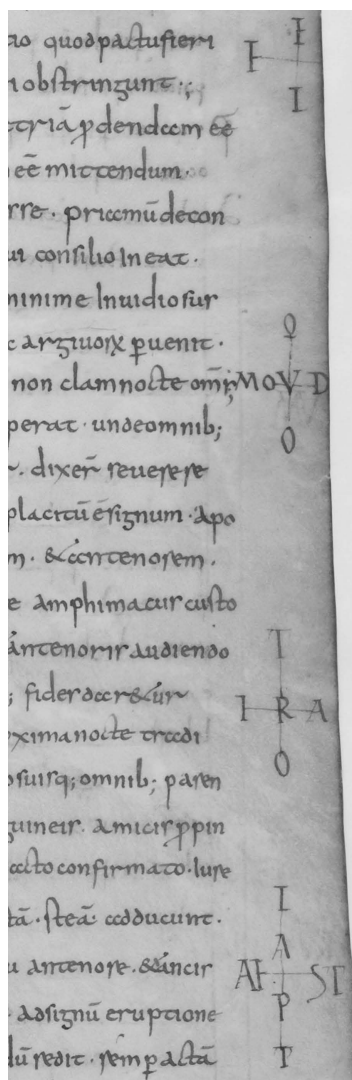


Fig. 8.18. Marginal cruciform monograms in Paris, BnF, Ms. lat. 7906, fol. 80r.

summations of text on corresponding pages. A late antique text believed to have originated in classical Greece was thus provided with pseudo-classical visual devices. The innovative graphic forms in the Carolingian Dares were probably inspired by sets of dedicatory cruciform monograms, which Carolingian travellers were able to observe on Byzantine monuments on their eastbound journeys.¹⁰⁵ Quite intentionally, the

¹⁰⁵ For example, in the eighth-century church of St Stephen (Fatih Camii) in Triglia (Trilye) in Byzantine Asia Minor, where medallions with cruciform monograms on the capitals have been

anonymous creator of these cruciform devices in Lorsch arranged their letters in such a way that the human gaze has to follow an early medieval crossing gesture in the process of their decoding (from the top to the bottom and from the left to the right). A generation later, these monogrammatic devices probably inspired another scribe at Lorsch, Valhramus, to create another set of dedicatory cruciform monograms in the gospel-book commissioned by Bishop Folcwich.¹⁰⁶

The *renovatio* of monogrammatic art in early Carolingian manuscript culture as an ennobling scribal practice associated with royal palaces and prominent royal monasteries took place at a time when Charlemagne's court promoted a higher level of literacy and 'correct' forms of writing among Frankish clergy, as exemplified by the *Admonitio generalis* (a. 789) and *De litteris colendis*. The use of monograms, monogrammatic initials, and monogrammatic lettering in early Carolingian manuscripts was as symptomatic of this new culture attentive to 'correct' visual forms of the written word as was the dissemination of Carolingian minuscule. The early Carolingian monogrammatic revival took different forms and found various applications, some of which have already been discussed earlier in this chapter. A few examples can provide a wide perspective for this new phenomenon. For example, the producer of a manuscript with writings of Cyprian produced in St Amand c.800, during the abbacy of the above-mentioned Arn of Salzburg, embellished many titles with both monogrammatic letterings and the monogram-like forms of *explicit*.¹⁰⁷ Furthermore, in a late eighth-century manuscript from the important abbey of Weissenburg (modern Wissembourg) in Lower Alsace, the monastic scribe Adallandus drew both monograms and various forms of monogrammatic initials and lettering (Fig. 8.23a), thus once again highlighting the connection between interest in monograms and a more general predilection for monogrammatic forms in Carolingian manuscript culture.¹⁰⁸ The same connection can be illustrated further by the development in some ninth-century Carolingian gospel-books of M-based quasi-monograms of New Testament figures, such as Mary Magdalene,¹⁰⁹ St Mark, and St Matthew,¹¹⁰ in which the letters of a name were arranged (sometimes in a cruciform order) inside the box form created by the initial M.

The inventive use of monograms and monogram-like devices in Carolingian scribal culture was not confined to liturgical and late antique literary texts. For example, some box and bar monograms appear in later ninth- and tenth-century

decoded as acclamations to its sponsors, e.g. *κύριε βοήθει τῷ δουλῷ Νηκήτᾳ πατρικίῳ* ('Lord, help your servant Patrician Nikita'): Weigand, 'Zur Monogramminschrift', p. 417. For other examples of medallions with cruciform monograms visible to visitors on monuments in ninth-century Byzantium and Constantinople in particular, see Chapters 7 and 9.

¹⁰⁶ See section 8.2.

¹⁰⁷ Munich, BSB, Clm. 208, fols 207r, 240r; CLA, 9.1237 (c.800); *Katalog*, no. 2922.

¹⁰⁸ Wolfenbüttel, HAB, Cod. Guelf. 14 Weiss. For more details on this manuscript, see the end of this chapter. See also monogrammatic lettering frequently used in titles in a canonical collection produced in the same abbey at the beginning of the ninth century: Wolfenbüttel, HAB, Cod. Guelf. 3 Weiss; *Katalog*, no. 7366.

¹⁰⁹ Arras, BM, Ms. lat. 233, fol. 43r.

¹¹⁰ Munich, BSB Clm. 14000, fols 13v and 44v; Paris, BnF, Ms. lat. 323, fols 20v and 67v (Court School of Charles the Bald, s. IX, ¾, KM, vol. 5, pp. 100–12).

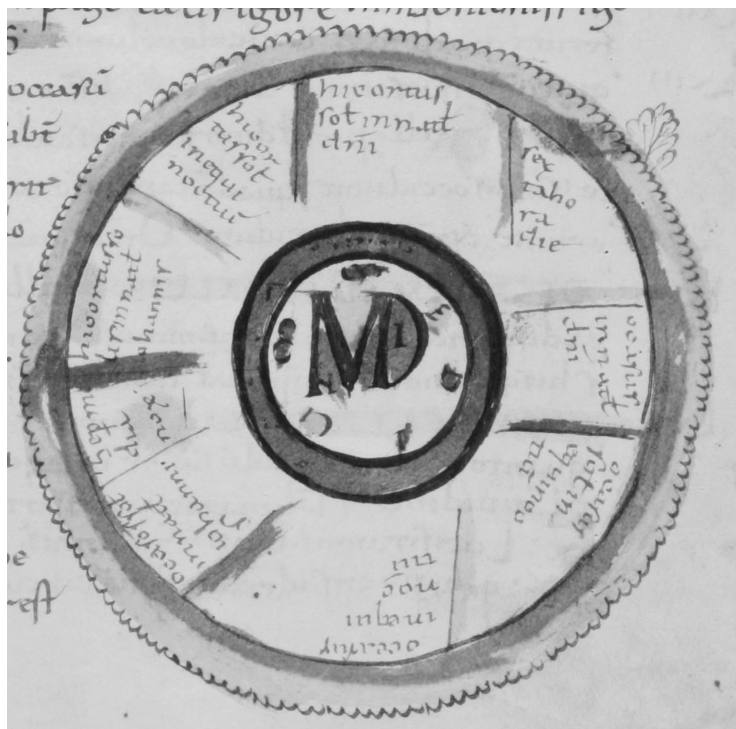


Fig. 8.19. Diagram with a central monogram in St Gallen, SB, Cod. Sang. 237, p. 63.

encyclopaedic and grammatical works to encode some specific terms or expressions.¹¹¹ Furthermore, a peculiar monogrammatic form of graphic visualization was drawn in a diagram accompanying a chapter on the path of the sun in a Carolingian copy of Isidore's *Etymologies* (3. 52), a manuscript produced in the royal East Frankish monastery of St Gall in the first half of the ninth century (Fig. 8.19).¹¹² The central roundel of this diagrammatic *rota* is designated as the centre of the world (*medium mundi*), with a box M-based monogram conceptualizing the last word to the text's readers.

A copy of the Martyrologium of Wandalbert of Prüm from the Vatican, produced c.850 or slightly later,¹¹³ amply illustrates the unique historical context explaining the growing popularity of scribal monograms during the Carolingian *renovatio*—a cultural context characterized by the close ties between royal courts, prominent royal monasteries, and noble monastic scribes. This manuscript was produced

¹¹¹ See the HAEC TIBI box monogram in Munich BSB, Clm. 14420, fol. 15r; *Katalog*, no. 3186 (probably northern France, s. IX²); and various box and bar monograms in Paris, BnF Ms. lat. 8672 (s. X).

¹¹² St Gallen, SB, Cod. Sang. 237, p. 63; *Katalog*, no. 5675. See also an A-based box monogram (ADAM) preceding the text of Hrabanus Maurus' *In libros regum* in Reims, BM, Ms. 129, 1r; *Katalog*, no. 5269 (Reims, s. IX).

¹¹³ Vatican City, BAV, Reg. lat. 438; *Katalog*, no. 6678.



Fig. 8.20. Scribal monograms from Vatican City, BAV, Reg. lat. 438, fol. 31v.

either in the aforementioned monastery of St Gall or more likely at the nearby royal abbey of Reichenau for the East Frankish king Louis the German, who is depicted on fol. 1v receiving the codex from a humble monk, who might represent both Wandalbert and this particular manuscript's producer.¹¹⁴ This self-referential image and its *titulus* does not spell out the name of the modest monastic scribe (referred to as *dignatus servus*—'worthwhile servant'), who encoded his name with two cruciform monograms after the text of the Martyrologium and two following short poems on planets and months (fol. 31v).¹¹⁵ The second monogram can be easily decoded as SCRIPSIT ('has written'), whereas the first eight-armed monogram with an M at its middle hides the name of the monastic scribe, either *Helmkerus* or *Helmerikus* (Fig. 8.20). Both names are listed in the *Liber memorialis* of Reichenau. The former name is mentioned only once as *Helmker*,¹¹⁶ while the latter is listed many times in different forms such as *Helmerih*, *Helmerich*, or *Helmmerich*. The latter name refers to monks from various Frankish abbeys—including those in East Francia—as well as the abbot *Helmmerichus* of Lorsch.¹¹⁷ The latter abbot (*Helmericus abba*) is attested in late eighth-century Carolingian royal charters.¹¹⁸ A person/s with the same name is/are listed in monastic charters of Werden (a. 796, 800, 805, and 806), Regensburg (a. 809), and Mondsee (a. 813).¹¹⁹ Another Helmeric is mentioned in the charter of Louis the Pious issued in 839, confirming a barter transaction between the abbot of Fulda, Hrabanus Maurus, and a royal vassal Helmeric.¹²⁰ This vassal must also have been listed in the memorial book of Reichenau, among the lay friends and deceased donors.¹²¹ The reappearance of this name in various East Frankish charters spanning through two or three generations

¹¹⁴ For more details and references, see Garipzanov, *Symbolic Language*, pp. 241–2 and note 136. The depictions of the personification of the twelve months are inspired by imagery from the *Calendar of 354*, which was copied in the Carolingian world; see Burgess, 'The Chronograph', pp. 364–5.

¹¹⁵ They are composed of lines taken from Dracontius' *Satisfaction* and attributed to Columbanus: Meyer, ed., *Anthologia*, vol. 2, pp. 51–2.

¹¹⁶ *Das Verbrüderungsbuch*, ed. Autenrieth et al., p. 103, no. h 283.

¹¹⁷ *Das Verbrüderungsbuch*, ed. Autenrieth et al., p. 103, no. h 289 (for abbot Helmerik, see facsimile 104^{C1}).

¹¹⁸ Pippini, Carlomanni, *Caroli Magni Diplomata*, ed. Mühlbacher, nos. 65 and 161.

¹¹⁹ Blok, *De Oudste particuliere oorkonden*, pp. 165–6, 178–9, and 187–9; *Die Traditionen*, ed. Widemann, pp. 8–9; *Das älteste Traditionsbuch*, ed. Rath and Reiter, pp. 131–2.

¹²⁰ Bedos-Rezak, *When Ego Was Imago*, p. XV.

¹²¹ *Das Verbrüderungsbuch*, ed. by Autenrieth and others, facsimile 104^{B1} and 114^{C2}.

indicates that this name must have been employed by a noble family, whose members advanced in both lay and clerical hierarchies in the eastern territories of the Carolingian realm. Such a familial profile fits well a monastic scribe in a prominent East Frankish royal monastery copying a luxurious codex for a Carolingian king and proudly 'sealing' it with his own monogram.

Helmerik's eight-armed graphic sign is meanwhile identical in form to a couple of monograms drawn in a short compilation usually titled *De inventione litterarum* or *De inventione linguarum* ('On the Invention of Letters/Languages')—a text that, since its first publication by the early modern antiquarian Melchior Goldast in 1606 and its later reprint in the *Patrologia Latina*, has traditionally been attributed to the aforementioned Hrabanus Maurus.¹²² René Derolez has undermined this attribution in his diligent study of the text's early transmission and related historiography, with a particular focus on its runic alphabet. Derolez demonstrated that the standard version of this short compilation included Hebrew, Greek, Latin, and runic abecedaries, as well as the alphabet of Aethicus Ister, whereas the manuscript tradition deriving from East Francia and later Germany also included sections on monograms, *notae Caesaris* (a short list of Roman epigraphic abbreviations), and the cryptic *notae* of St Boniface in the final part.¹²³ Aethicus' work was written soon after 727, probably in Bobbio, an Irish monastic foundation in northern Italy, and its early copies were produced in scribal centres in Bavaria, Alemannia, and Lower Alsace.¹²⁴ The material compiled in other sections was also known in Carolingian scribal culture in the second half of the eighth century. For example, the name of Orosius was encoded with the notes of St Boniface in the explicit of the former's *Seven Books of History against the Pagans*, in a codex produced probably in Laon in the mid-eighth century.¹²⁵ Furthermore, as illustrated by the aforementioned manuscript of Agambertus (a. 806), the replacement of Latin script with exotic letter characters in scribal colophons became popular in some Frankish writing centres by the turn of the ninth century,¹²⁶ when this practice developed into a visual marker of scribal excellence in addition to being a form of cryptography. As to the text's runic material, Derolez argued persuasively that it derived from eighth-century Anglo-Saxon England and adapted to Old High German phonology, and consequently suggested the eastern parts of the Frankish lands as the areas in which the *De inventione* had originated by the early ninth century.¹²⁷

Many copies of this text appear in grammatical compilations, which began to be produced actively from the late eighth century on the encouragement of Charlemagne's

¹²² Goldast, ed., *Alamannicarum rerum scriptores aliquot vetusti*, vol. 2, pp. 91–3; PL, vol. 112, cols 1579–83.

¹²³ Derolez, *Runica Manuscripta*, pp. 279–371. On the 'western majuscule' used for Greek letters in Carolingian manuscripts, see Kaczynski, *Greek*, pp. 29–30.

¹²⁴ *The Cosmography of Aethicus Ister*, ed. Herren, pp. lxi and lxxii.

¹²⁵ Laon, BM, Ms. 137, fol. 140r; CLA, 6.765.

¹²⁶ For example, see Würzburg, UB, M.p.misc.f. 5a, fol. 40r (CLA, 9.1402, s. VIII–IX); Munich, BSB, Clm. 14325, fol. 74v (CLA, 9.1295, s. VIII ex.)

¹²⁷ Derolez, *Runica Manuscripta*, pp. 371–8.

court.¹²⁸ The full version of the *De inventione* including its monogrammatic section was most likely composed originally for one of such grammatical miscellanea around the same time, probably in one of the prominent eastern monastic scriptoria where cruciform monograms appear in concurrent manuscripts—for example, in St Gall, which hosted some Anglo-Saxon and Irish monks and where the use of Greek is attested from the early ninth century.¹²⁹

The content of the earliest surviving manuscript with this text produced at that Alemannic abbey (Codex Sangallensis 876) is indicative in this regard, with its inclusion of grammatical works of Donatus, Diomedes, and Bede.¹³⁰ The *De inventione* was added to this miscellanea at the beginning of the ninth century (pp. 278–91), and the errors committed in the process of its copying suggests that the latter treatise is ‘several removes from the original text’.¹³¹ The folio with the larger portion of the monogrammatic section is missing from the manuscript (Goldast has been blamed for this damage),¹³² which hence preserves only the final part of text on monograms along with the drawings of five cruciform monograms (Fig. 8.21). The surviving passage on monograms in this manuscript is nearly identical to the corresponding text in the 1606 edition of Goldast, and surviving monograms are exactly the same as their graphic counterparts in the latter edition (Fig. 8.22). The only difference is the changed positions of the MATHIAS and BARTHOLOMEUS monograms in the two texts, but it is possible that either Goldast or the creator of his copy switched their positions because the latter monogram required more space on the page. Goldast’s edition contains eighteen

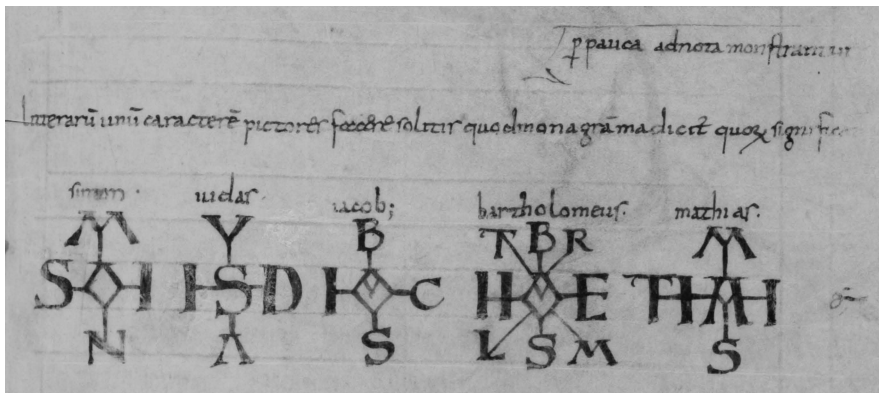


Fig. 8.21. Preserved monogrammatic section of the *De inventione litterarum* in St Gallen, SB, Cod. Sang. 876, p. 281.

¹²⁸ Bischoff, ‘Libraries’, pp. 98–9. For this cultural context for the creation of the *De inventione*, see Treffort, ‘*De inventione*’.

¹²⁹ Kaczynski, *Greek*; Saenger, *Space*, p. 103.

¹³⁰ St Gallen, SB, Cod. Sang. 876; *Katalog*, no. 5858.

¹³¹ Derolez, *Runica Manuscripta*, pp. 290–5. See Fig. 8.22: ‘*solitis*’ for ‘*soliti s[unt]*’, and ‘*adnota*’ for ‘*adnotata*’.

¹³² Derolez, *Runica Manuscripta*, pp. 294 and 303–4.

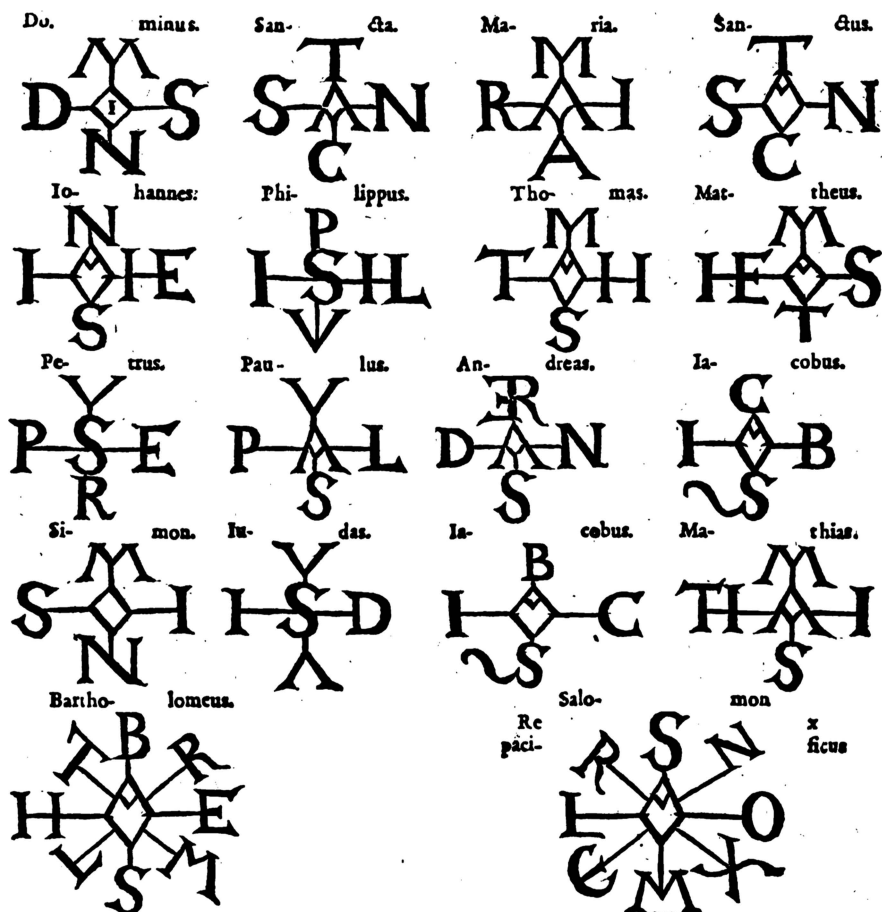


Fig. 8.22. Monograms of the *De inventione litterarum* in the 1606 edition of Goldast.

cruciform monograms, whereas the eleventh- and twelfth-century copies originating from Lorsch and from the Cistercian monastery of Salem in the vicinity of St Gall display nineteen.¹³³ Yet the additional monogram DEUS appearing in the later manuscripts on the second position in the monogrammatic set differ structurally from the others and might have been added at a later date. The latter two manuscripts lack the textual passage on monograms. This paragraph is meanwhile present in a twelfth-century manuscript currently kept in Vienna and in a lost manuscript of the Munich antiquary A. Weinmüller (c.1100), both produced somewhere in Austria,¹³⁴ and they preserve this passage in a form nearly identical

¹³³ Vienna, ÖNB, Cod. 1761, fols 100v–102v, and Heidelberg, UB, Cod. Sal. IX.39, fols 1r and 2r; Derolez, *Runica Manuscripta*, pp. 299–302 and 305–8.

¹³⁴ Vienna, ÖNB, Cod. 1010, fol. 90r, and Plassmann and Krause, 'Die Hrabanische Runenreihe'; Derolez, *Runica Manuscripta*, pp. 309–12.

to the one in Codex Sangallensis 876 and Goldast's edition. At the same time, the Vienna and Munich copies differ from the other manuscripts of this tradition in preserving only the first cruciform monogram (DOMINUS, 'The Lord') from the original set.

Unlike the other textual paragraphs in this treatise, the passage on monograms does not have earlier textual parallels. In all likelihood, it was written in the late eighth century as a textual introduction to the cruciform monograms drawn beneath, in imitation of other passages of the *De inventione* preceding the lists of letters and abbreviations. In this textual context, the author's description of the monograms as a form of lettering is not surprising. In a broader perspective, this passage bears witness to a growing interest in monograms in early Carolingian scribal culture, and it provides us with a late eighth-century innovative 're-invention' of the monogrammatic tradition somewhere in the south-eastern parts of the Frankish realm. For this reason, this short passage deserves a closer inspection:

Letters written in the form of a monogram are found in some places, where a representative depiction has been made as a wall mosaic or on textiles, or elsewhere in another manner. In such places, painters were accustomed to present the names of these [figures] with letters combined in one character, which is called a monogram. Their meaning is shown below with short notes.

Litterae enim monogrammae scriptae nonnullis in locis inveniuntur, ubi pictura cum museo in pariete imaginis aut in velis, vel alicubi aliter facta fuerit, ibi eorum nomina cum congerie litterarum, unum characterem pictores facere soliti sunt, quod monogramma dicitur, quorum significatio subtilis per pauca adnotata monstrantur.

A set of cruciform monograms is drawn below the text, starting with those of the Lord (DOMINUS) and the Holy Mary (SANCTA MARIA)—which are followed with the monogrammatic signs of the thirteen apostles preceded by the related 'Saint' (SANCTUS) monogram. In Goldast's edition, the set ends with an enigmatic eight-armed monogram 'King Solomon' (SALOMON REX), which is accompanied with a slightly different note, *Salomon rex pacificus* ('Solomon, peace-making king') (Fig. 8.22).¹³⁵

The writer of this passage was obviously aware of the practice of placing monograms on monuments and objects in Italy and the Greek East—especially those invoking the Lord in a cruciform form (*KYPIOΣ BOHΘEI*) and the box monograms of the Virgin Mary (*Η ΑΓΙΑ/ΜΑΡΙΑ*)—and might have seen or heard of some monograms in Ravennate mosaics without a proper understanding of their meaning. The author must also have observed some Byzantine silk and linen cloths with Greek cruciform monograms woven on them that were displayed on altars or kept in shrines and reliquaries in Frankish areas,¹³⁶ as well as in northern

¹³⁵ Note that the *Patrologia Latina* re-edition of the Goldast's text presents a corrupted form of the latter monogram.

¹³⁶ For two early Byzantine monogrammed silks kept in Frankish churches, see Muthesius, 'Memory and Meaning', pp. 354–9.

Italy where a monogrammed linen altar cloth has been preserved in the treasury of Monza Cathedral.¹³⁷ This sixth-century cloth features a cruciform $\Phi\Omega\Sigma$ – $Z\Omega H$ ('Light–Life') monogram at its middle, surrounded by four cruciform Greek monograms encoding the names of the evangelists—two of them being apostles. Monograms of that kind may have inspired the author of the monogrammatic section to design the Latin monograms of the thirteen apostles for his text.¹³⁸

The designer of the monogrammatic set in the *De inventione* was clearly influenced by the form of Charlemagne's monogrammatic device: ten monograms feature a central lozenge—a graphic element with a Christological meaning—with eight imitating the lozenge of Charles' sign. All the monograms display a letter or combination of letters at the middle—a feature that became characteristic of the ninth-century Carolingian monograms. The addition of Solomon's monogram to the list of the New Testament names and the choice of Charlemagne's lozenge for its middle part are noteworthy because in the late eighth century Charlemagne was occasionally likened to the peace-making king Solomon, a model king in the early Middle Ages. In the Carolingian political thought of the 780s and 790s, the latter was referred to as the Old Testament pre-figuration of peace-making Christ.¹³⁹ As early as around 775, an Anglo-Saxon monk Cathuulf likened Charlemagne to this biblical ruler, as did Alcuin later on.¹⁴⁰ The final monogram in the *De inventione* thus visualized this association in a graphic form. Moreover, from the 790s, the title *pacificus rex* began to be applied to the Carolingian king in contemporary political discourse.¹⁴¹ The very same title was written by the sides of Solomon's monogram despite the fact that the latter did not in fact incorporate the appellation *pacificus* in its graphic structure—the only discrepancy between a monogram and a corresponding annotation in the entire set, indicating the significance of this title to the designer of this graphic device.¹⁴² This particular feature suggests the 790s as a likely time for the creation of the *De inventione* or, at least, of its monogrammatic section.

A similar cognizance of eastern cruciform devices and a similar interest in the graphic sign of the Old Testament king can be observed in a late eighth-century manuscript containing Cassiodorus' commentaries on Psalms 100–150, which was produced at the monastery of Weissenburg located on the fringe the larger area between the Rhine and Moselle, in which the contemporaneous courtly scriptorium was probably located.¹⁴³ The transcriber of this text, Adallandus, is known

¹³⁷ Merati, *Il tesoro*, pp. 8–9, figs 5–6.

¹³⁸ Note that, in order to differentiate the two apostles named Jacob, the designer switched the locations of the letters B and C in their monograms.

¹³⁹ Kershaw, *Peaceful Kings*, pp. 144–6.

¹⁴⁰ *Epistolae variorum*, no. 7, ed. Dümmler, p. 503. On Cathuulf's letter, see Garrison, 'Letters'. See also Noble, *Images*, pp. 234–5.

¹⁴¹ For more details and references, see Kershaw, *Peaceful Kings*, pp. 162–3.

¹⁴² In one version of the *De inventione* transmitted in the high Middle Ages (Vienna, ÖNB, Cod. 1761, and Heidelberg, UB, Cod. Sal. IX.39), this monogram and the annotated text were changed to SALOMON FECIT ('Solomon has made') and *pacificus fecit* respectively, which suggests that the early Carolingian political message was lost by the eleventh century where monastic copyists could interpret that graphic device as an authorial or scribal monogram.

¹⁴³ Bischoff, 'Manuscripts', p. 21; McKitterick, *Charlemagne*, pp. 359–60.

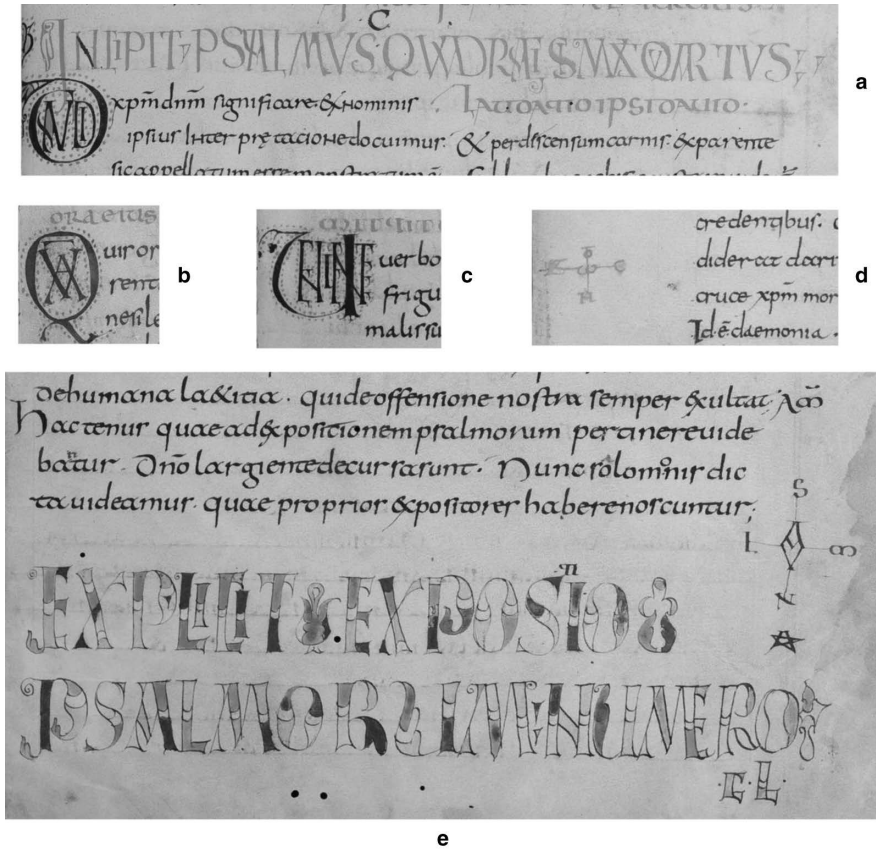


Fig. 8.23. Monogrammatic devices in Wolfenbüttel, HAB, Cod. Guelf. 14 Weiss.: a) monogrammatic initial and lettering on fol. 221r; b) monogrammatic initial on fol. 18r; c) monogrammatic initial on fol. 235r; d) the $\Phi\Omega\Sigma$ - $Z\Omega H$ monogram on fol. 23v; e) Solomon's monogram and sign on fol. 247r. © HAB Wolfenbüttel <<http://diglib.hab.de/mss/14-weiss/start.htm>>

to have written various charters for this monastery between 782 and 790,¹⁴⁴ and his manuscript might have been produced in the same years. His numerous monogrammatic initials surrounded by red dots are clearly influenced by Insular forms (Fig. 8.23b–c). In addition, the monastic scribe drew two cruciform monograms of particular interest for the monogrammatic section in the *De inventione*.¹⁴⁵ The first appears in the margins of Cassiodorus' commentaries on two verses of Psalm 103: '(21) Thou hast appointed darkness, and it is night: in it shall all the beasts of the woods go about: (22) The young lions roaring after their prey, and

¹⁴⁴ Wolfenbüttel, HAB, Cod. Guelf. 14 Weiss.; CLA, 9.1384.

¹⁴⁵ The third cruciform monogram of fol. 145r is hard to decode and is omitted from my discussion.

seeking their meat from God'. Cassiodorus explains these lines as referring to the sixth hour of the Passion, when Jesus died on the Cross and when the world was in turmoil and demons seemed to have prevailed. In the same vein, according to Cassiodorus, the following verse—'(22) The sun ariseth, and they are gathered together: and they shall lie down in their dens'—refers allegorically to the Resurrection.¹⁴⁶ Adallandus illustrated these explanations with the aforementioned cruciform monogram $\Phi\Omega\Sigma-Z\Omega H$ ('Light-Life'), the two attributes of God particularly relevant to Cassiodorus' explanation (Fig. 8.23d). It is evident that the scribe entered troubled waters while transcribing this Greek monogrammatic sign: the rendering of the phi is odd, and the eta and sigma erroneously switched their positions. These errors notwithstanding, it is obvious that Adallandus was familiar with the gist of this early Byzantine device and proudly added it in the margin as a graphic encapsulation of this particular exposition by Cassiodorus. Adallandus was not a unique scribe in his knowledge of this Byzantine cruciform invocation. For example, another scribe added a much better drawn $\Phi\Omega\Sigma-Z\Omega H$ graphic device in a margin of a text written in St Gall in the second half of the ninth century—this time with a traditional early Byzantine acclamation between the arm of the cross (*Ἰησοῦς Χριστὸς νικά*, 'Jesus Christ conquers').¹⁴⁷ Similarly to Adallandus' usage, the later graphic invocation was employed appropriately by illustrating the passage referring to the daytime darkness during the Crucifixion.¹⁴⁸

The second cruciform device of Adallandus, the one at the very end of the text (fol. 247r), represents the monogram of Solomon and thus is directly connected to the similar monogram in the *De inventione*. The second device appears in the margin next to the final phrase of the main text, preceding its explicit. The phrase referring to follow-up commentaries on the Solomonic writings is thought to derive from the original text of Cassiodorus' *Institutiones*, where it introduced the latter's explanations on biblical books associated with Solomon, namely Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, Song of Songs, Wisdom, and Ecclesiasticus (Fig. 8.23e).¹⁴⁹ Near this textual reference to the Old Testament ruler, Adallandus drew a cruciform monogram of SALOMON, as if that page had been a royal charter of the Jewish king. In doing so, the scribe undoubtedly imitated Charlemagne's graphic sign of authority, by having the vowel letters O and A assembled at the central lozenge and the four consonants attached to the arms of the cross. Adallandus was probably cognizant of connections drawn between Charlemagne and King Solomon in contemporary political culture and made exactly the same point in this manuscript by means of graphicacy. To avoid any confusion, he drew a pentalpha, also known as pentagram, beneath the monogram of the biblical king. The pentalpha was known among late antique Christians as the powerful apotropaic sign of Solomon.

¹⁴⁶ Cassiodorus, *Expositio psalmodum*, 103.20–2, ed. Adriaen, pp. 934–5. For English translation, see Cassiodorus, *Explanation of the Psalms*, trans. Walsh, pp. 41–2.

¹⁴⁷ Zurich, Zentralbibliothek, Ms. C78, fol. 157r; Kaczynski, *Greek*, p. 42.

¹⁴⁸ A Sibylline prophecy at Augustine, *De civitate dei*, 18. 23, ed. Dombart and Kalb, p. 615.

¹⁴⁹ 'Nunc Solomonis dicta videamus, quae proprios expositores habere noscuntur', Cassiodorus, *Expositio psalmodum*, ed. Adriaen, p. 1352. See also Courcelle, 'Histoire', p. 66, note 4; O'Loughlin, 'The Structure', pp. 56 and 64.

According to the fourth-century Christian Greek text known as *The Testament of Solomon* and later transmitted in the Byzantine world, this Jewish king received from God a ring (or seal) inscribed with that symbol and giving its possessor power over all the demons.¹⁵⁰ By the late fourth century, western pilgrims were able to see the ring of Solomon accessible for veneration in the Church of the Holy Sepulchre in Jerusalem.¹⁵¹ Hence, it is possible that Adallandus drew this symbol on the last page to protect the text against evil forces. At the same time, it is more probable that, by adding a pentalpha below the monogram, he provided contemporary and future readers with a visual clue for decoding his enigmatic monogrammatic device, resembling the graphic sign of authority of his Carolingian ruler.

All in all, the cruciform monograms in Adallandus' manuscript and the *De inventione* indicate that, in the eyes of their producers, such signs with an established tradition of usage in the 'Empire of the Romans' and reminiscent of the widely known Carolingian symbol of royal authority were adequate graphic means of visualizing the authority of the Lord, his apostles, and the Virgin Mary. In a similar vein, some members of the ninth-century clergy such as Bishop Hanto or the monastic scribe Helmerik thought it was appropriate to employ cruciform monograms to affirm their spiritual authority in the manuscripts they commissioned or produced. Yet in the end, all the cruciform monogrammatic signs that appear in different media in the Carolingian world—including Charlemagne's graphic symbol—derived their transcendent authority from one ultimate source: the sign of the Cross. Its apotropaic and salvific power remained supreme in the Carolingian world, and its various graphic forms not only constituted a default graphic mode of referring to God in all His manifestations, but also developed into an alternative visual form of beseeching divine protection and intervention.

¹⁵⁰ *The Testament of Solomon*, trans. Condybeare, p. 16; Busch, ed., *Das Testament Salomos*, pp. 84–93.

¹⁵¹ For further details and references, see Boustani and Beshay, 'Sealing the Demons'.

The Power of the Cross and Cruciform Devices in the Carolingian World

The preceding discussion of a monogrammatic revival in the Carolingian era has demonstrated again and again that, not unlike early Byzantine graphic culture, the sign of the cross (*signum crucis*) functioned in the West as the primordial blueprint for many visual devices. This sign was embedded in the *Vere dignum* and *Te igitur* initials embellishing the pages of Frankish sacramentaries. It structured Charlemagne's royal symbol of authority and the graphic signs of his emulators. It defined numerous monogrammatic signs appearing in various Latin manuscripts and, in particular, the monograms of the Virgin Mary, the Lord, and His apostles in the *De inventione litterarum*. Moreover, from late antiquity onwards, the sign of the cross was viewed not only as a graphic encapsulation of the major tenets at the heart of the Christian faith, such as Crucifixion and Salvation, but also as a potent sign providing a direct recourse to divine forces. In early Byzantium, this belief gave birth to various acclamatory and invocational cruciform devices, some of which became known in the early medieval Latin West. Yet Carolingian graphic designers were more than simply cultural epigones of their late antique and early Byzantine predecessors, and were able to contribute to the earlier graphic stock by adding new symbolic elements, such as Charlemagne's lozenge, or by developing new forms of monogrammatic initials. In a similar vein, Carolingian clerical masters were able to 're-invent' the late antique genre of cruciform invocations by skilfully applying them to material media of paramount importance for contemporary elite culture, namely manuscripts.

9.1. THE BIBLE OF SAN PAOLO FUORI LE MURA AND CRUCIFORM INVOCATIONS IN CAROLINGIAN RELIGIOUS MANUSCRIPTS

The cruciform devices of an invocational and acclamational nature originating from late antique manuscript culture, such as *ora pro me* ('pray for me') and *amen*, were transmitted into the colophons of books in the early Carolingian period, particularly in northern Italy. For example, the former device can be seen in the codex with the *Dialogues* of Gregory the Great created in East Francia around 800, probably in the abbey of Lorsch (Fig. 9.1a),¹ whereas the latter appears in his homilies

¹ The name *Gerunc* was added to this formula in the tenth century: Würzburg, UB, M.p.th.f.19, fol. 67v (CLA, 9.1406; *Katalog*, 3.7468).



Fig. 9.1. Cruciform devices from Carolingian manuscripts: a) Würzburg, UB, M.p.th.f.19, fol. 67v; b) Munich, BSB, Clm. 6329, fol. 192r; c) Bamberg, Staatsbibliothek, Msc. Patr. 61, fol. 103r; d) Rome, Abbazia di San Paolo f.l.m., Biblia, fol. 1r.

written in northern Italy or Switzerland in the late eighth century (Fig. 9.1b).² In the same period, scribes began to improvise with such traditional cross-shaped colophon devices, as in the collection of scientific works composed in the abbey of Montecassino, south of Rome, or in the manuscript with the *Passion of St Apollinaris*, probably produced in Ravenna. Their colophons display, respectively, a peculiar cruciform monogram of *amen* (Fig. 9.1c) and the formula *deo gratias* ('by the grace of God') written four times in the form of an elaborated cross crosslet.³

Yet a more radical change in the application of invocational devices in Carolingian manuscript culture took place only in the second half of the ninth century, in the same period that witnessed the emergence of new conceptual graphic forms of the *Te igitur* and *In principio* initials in sacramentaries and gospel-books respectively. In this later period, some major scriptoria in Francia were designing new forms of graphicacy that accommodated the long-established tradition of invocational monograms to the Carolingian visual culture of religious manuscripts. Three manuscripts exemplify the different aspects of this creative process.

² Munich, BSB, Clm. 6329, fol. 192r (CLA, 9.1276; Bischoff, *Die südostdeutschen Schreibschulen*, vol. 1, pp. 144–5).

³ Bamberg, Staatsbibliothek, Msc. Patr. 61, fol. 103r (s. VIII, ex., CLA, 8.1029; *Katalog*, no. 234a); St Petersburg, National Library of Russia, Lat.F.v.I.12, fol. 62v (Ravenna, s. VIII, CLA, 11.1608).

The first manuscript, the luxurious Bible of San Paolo fuori le mura, originated from the prolific cathedral School of Reims around the year 870 or 871,⁴ under the stewardship of the closest advisor to King Charles the Bald, Archbishop Hincmar of Reims (845–82). The manuscript was probably produced as a gift to Charles, and its iconographic as well as graphic program encapsulated Hincmar's message regarding the royal authority of the West Frankish ruler and its spiritual sources. The Bible was illuminated with various images, including the symbolic image of its recipient: the enthroned Carolingian king is depicted as flanked by his noble wife and guards, and holding a red object, traditionally described as an orb, with a cruciform monogram drawn onto it in golden ink (Fig. 9.1d).⁵ Several scholars have attempted to decode this mysterious monogram, all inconclusive so far. Half a century ago, Herbert Schade attempted to decipher it with reference to the images of King Solomon in this manuscript and to contemporary textual allusions to that Old Testament ruler at the court of Charles the Bald. Consequently, Schade decoded this graphic device as an arcane caption to the image: *hic rex novae romae salomon* ('Here is Solomon, the king of the New Rome').⁶ Yet his proposed 'reading' is highly problematic for several reasons. To begin with, at the time of the manuscript's production, the term 'the New Rome' was traditionally applied to Constantinople. For example, in a letter written in 871, another Carolingian ruler, Louis II of Italy, addressed the Byzantine emperor Basil as emperor of the New Rome.⁷ Secondly, King Solomon is never mentioned in the accompanying poem beneath the royal image, which accentuates instead the special nature of the relationship between the Divine King, Jesus Christ, and the earthly king, Charles.⁸ Thirdly, Schade's suggestion implies that the monogram's single letters A and E must have been used thrice, while ninth-century Carolingian monograms tended to include every letter of encoded words whenever possible and occasionally allowed the double-reading of some letters. Finally, one may ask why Charles would be identified on this image in such an unusual way, which does not have any comparable parallel in the early Middle Ages.

Some years before Schade, Percy E. Schramm decoded this enigmatic monogram in the context of the poem accompanying the royal image, as *Christe, conserva Carolum et Richildim* ('Christ, protect Charles and Richildis').⁹ His deciphering was inspired by the assumption that the royal spouse depicted to the right of the king is his second wife, Richildis, an identification that the surrounding text does

⁴ Earlier studies suggested St Denis as the place of the manuscript's production: Kantorowicz, 'The Carolingian King', pp. 287 and 299–300; Schramm, *Die deutschen Kaiser*, pp. 55–6 and 170–2. But recent research has revealed its connection to the School of Reims on art historical grounds: Gachde, 'The Bible', pp. 11–12; Diebold, 'The Ruler Portrait'; KM, vol. 6.2, pp. 8–9, 109–74, and 230–2.

⁵ Rome, Abbazia di San Paolo f.l.m., fol. 1r, originally fol. 337v; Cardinali, ed., *La bibbia*, p. 20. For a detailed analysis of this image and related bibliography, see Garipzanov, *Symbolic Language*, pp. 255–8.

⁶ Schade, 'Studien', especially 22 (1960), pp. 13–25. For a similar interpretation of this image as a propagandistic self-representation of Charles the Bald as a new Solomon, see Staubach, *Rex Christianus*, p. 281.

⁷ *Ludovici II. imperatoris epistola*, ed. Henze, p. 386.

⁸ KM, vol. 6.2, pp. 126–7.

⁹ Schramm, *Die deutschen Kaiser*, no. 41.

not corroborate directly. Moreover, the monogram in question lacks a letter D, which would have been essential if the name of that queen had been encoded in this graphic device.

In 1994, William Diebold suggested a more plausible solution to this early medieval monogrammatic puzzle. He pointed out that the two pairs of single letters at the lower and right arms of the cruciform sign, IH and XR, should be read as monograms of Jesus Christ's name, perhaps in the vocative, while the remaining letters C, R, L, and M could be resolved as the accusative form of Charles' name, *Carolus*.¹⁰ Based on this incisive observation, Schramm's reading can be corrected as follows: *Iesu Christe, conserva Carolum* ('Jesus Christ, protect Charles'). The vocative form of the *nomina sacra*—IHU XRE (*Iesu Christe*)—would explain the location of IH at the bottom, just below the central rhomb, the lower lines of which provide the *nomen sacrum* with its final U. The ending of the other *nomen sacrum*, an E, is neatly placed in the field between the two sacred names. This E, together with the combination of AN at the left arm, C on the top, R, S, and L between the cross-arms, and O, V/U, and M at the middle provide all the necessary letters for the phrase *conserva Carolum*. The proposed decoding employs monogrammatic letters only once or twice, and the final letter of the phrase is placed right at the middle.

This decoding makes Jesus Christ the main addressee of the monogrammatic message, which corresponds to the use of a lozenge at the middle of the monogram, considering the possible Christological implications of that particular graphic element, as discussed in the previous chapter. This decoding of the encrypted message correlates not only with the accompanying poetic lines but also with the texts of a dedicatory poem, which describes the manuscript as Charles' offering to Christ.¹¹ In a similar way to late antique invocational monograms, the graphic message in this Bible was thus intentionally hidden from uninvited gazes, its intelligibility restricted to the producer, commissioner, earthly receiver, and, most importantly, the Divine Lord. The encoded phrase also echoes invocational legends on Carolingian seals addressing Christ, such as *Christe, protege Carolum regem Francorum* ('Christ, protect Charles, king of the Franks') for Charlemagne, *Christe, protege Hludowicum imperatorem* ('Christ, protect Emperor Louis') for Louis the Pious, and *Christe, adiuva Hlotharium augustum* ('Christ, help August Lothar') for Lothar I.¹² The appearance of the monogrammed disc on the royal image indicates that this similarity with the contemporary sphragistic tradition was hardly accidental. The round shape of the disc and the range of dots on its rim make it identical to contemporary Byzantine lead seals, which could occasionally reach the hands of ninth-century Carolingian dignitaries in contact with the Byzantine world, and many of which featured cruciform invocative monograms beseeching the Mother of God or the Lord for divine assistance.¹³

¹⁰ Diebold, 'The Ruler Portrait', p. 8, note 7.

¹¹ *Bibliothecarum et psalteriorum versus*, ed. Traube, p. 258; Diebold, 'The Ruler Portrait', pp. 16–17.

¹² Dalas, ed., *Corpus*, pp. 95–101, nos. 16–17, 19–20, and 22; Schramm, *Die deutschen Kaiser*, pp. 34–5, 43–4, 148–9, 156, and 160.

¹³ For more details, see Chapter 7.

In contemporary Byzantium, such cruciform monograms also addressed Christ, as demonstrated by the ‘Beautiful Doors’ in the Constantinopolitan church of Hagia Sophia. In 838/9, these doors were installed in the vestibule at the south-west end of the narthex, which by that time was used for royal entry. The doors were embellished with bronze panels inscribed with eight paired monograms, a couple of which were slightly changed two years later. Placed inside medallions, these graphic signs undoubtedly imitated the cruciform invocational devices in contemporary Byzantine sphragistics, and functioned as quasi seals marking the imperial entrance into liturgical space. They encoded three invocations: ‘Lord, help the ruler Theophilos’ (*Κύριε βοήτει Θεοφίλω δεσπότῃ*), ‘Mother of God, help the empress Theodora’ (*Θεοτόκε βοήθει Θεοδώρᾳ αὐγούστῃ*), and ‘Christ, help the ruler Michael’ (*Χριστὲ βοήθει Μιχαὴλ δεσπότῃ*).¹⁴ The last monogrammatic invocation (Fig. 9.2a–b) represents a close match to the graphic device in the Bible of San Paolo fuori le mura, a device investing Charles with a salvific seal of the Lord and protecting the Carolingian king from all evil forces. Moreover, it is well known that the figurative imagery of this codex is suffused with visual similes between Charles the Bald and King Solomon, which corresponds to a number of similes between the two rulers in texts related to the contemporary West Frankish court.¹⁵ By investing the West Frankish king with a protective seal invoking his Lord, Jesus Christ, the producer provided yet another parallel between Charles and the exemplary Old Testament king, who was believed to have possessed a protective seal of God.

Another peculiar graphic device hiding a possible invocational message was drawn in the Sacramentary of St Maurice of Tours, produced in the abbey of

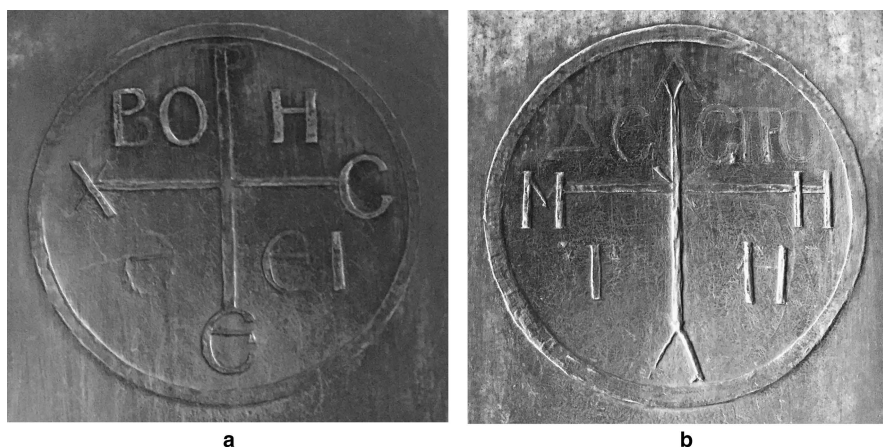


Fig. 9.2. Two paired monograms on the ‘Beautiful Doors’ in Hagia Sophia, Istanbul: a) *Χριστὲ βοήθει*; b) *Μιχαὴλ δεσπότῃ*. Photo by Joe Glynias.

¹⁴ Swift, ‘The Bronze Doors’; Mango, ‘When Was Michael’, 253–4; and Haldon and Brubaker, *Byzantium*, pp. 435–7.

¹⁵ Staubach, *Rex christianus*.



Fig. 9.3. *Tē igitur* in Paris, BnF, Ms. Nouv. Acq. lat. 1589, fol. 10r.

St Martin of Tours in the last quarter of the ninth century.¹⁶ It appears to the left of the *Tē igitur* initial visualizing the prayer of the celebrant accompanying the liturgical transformation of the eucharist into the body of Jesus Christ (Fig. 9.3). Another near-contemporary sacramentary produced in the same abbey displays this liturgical moment, with a priest standing in front of a host and chalice praying with raised hands to the tau cross of Crucifixion, symbolized by the initial 'T'.¹⁷ In contrast to this figural composition, the former *Tē igitur* page displays a cruciform monogram with a lozenge at its middle. This graphic device is surrounded by a textual invocation, probably on behalf of the manuscript's recipient, written with Greek and Latin letters in a clockwise movement: ΛΩΝΓΩΒΑΡΔΟΣ ΧΡΙ ΣΑΚΗΡΔΩΣ VIVAT IN XPO ('May Longobardos, priest of Christ, live in Christ!'). The complicated monogram encodes another phrase including the name *Zacharias*, probably referring to the monastic producer of this image.

¹⁶ Paris, BnF, Ms. Nouv. Acq. lat. 1589, fol. 10r; *Katalog*, no. 5093.

¹⁷ Tours, BM, Ms. 184, fol. 3r.

The same desire to place monogrammatic forms within liturgical settings and, thus, to address divine agents can be observed in a monogrammatic set added at the end of Bede's commentaries on Samuel, a manuscript produced at the abbey of Corbie in the mid-ninth century.¹⁸ These graphic devices are reminiscent of eight-armed monograms in the *De inventione litterarum*, and similarly to the latter work, some of them feature lozenge or the letter A at the middle (Fig. 9.4). The seven monograms from Corbie encode the following phrase: 1. *Sancte Michabel*, 2. *archangele*, 3. *defende nos*, 4. *in praelio*, 5. *ut non perreamus*, 6. *in tremendo*, 7. *iudicio* ('Saint Michael Archangel, defend us in battle that we might not perish at the dreadful judgement'). The same phrase is written at the middle of the page, dividing the first three monograms from the other four and finishing with a liturgical acclamation, *alleluia*. This text represents an alleluia verse for St Michael's mass listed in Frankish sacramentaries on 29 September. Charlemagne promoted the Lombard cult of St Michael the Archangel at Monte Gargano as a patron saint of the Roman empire (or *imperium Christianum*), and by the ninth century the cult of St Michael was flourishing in the Carolingian world.¹⁹

This monogrammatic set does not encode the personal name of its producer, nor does it conceal a text to be deciphered. The fact that the textual content of these monograms was spelled out on the same page in a manner reminiscent of the dedication page in the *Calendar of 354* suggests that these graphic devices did not fulfil an ostensibly textual function. Rather, they enshrined a liturgical invocation within a graphic form that invited repetitive visual contemplation, and that may have been perceived as more efficacious in reaching out to the powerful saint. All in all, they provide yet further, suggestive examples of the importance of liturgical settings for the development of Carolingian graphycacy.

9.2. THE SIGN OF THE CROSS IN MANUSCRIPT AND MATERIAL CULTURE

Our understanding of these ninth-century cruciform invocations would be incomplete without setting this new graphic development within the broader context of Carolingian culture—a world in which the sign of the cross enjoyed paramount importance. Embodied in material liturgical objects such as portable processional and benedictional crosses, this sign ultimately referred to its prototype, the Cross of Golgotha, and the related theology of Crucifixion and Salvation; the sign's transcendent power was thus derived from its wholly unique prototype.²⁰ In this sense, the deployment of the sign of the cross in the Carolingian world was not radically different from its use in the late antique Latin West. What was clearly new though was the much wider scope for the veneration of the cross, and the ubiquitous

¹⁸ Paris, BnF, Ms. lat. 12272, fol. 104v (Ganz, *Corbie*, pp. 57 and 151; cf. *Katalog*, no. 4806).

¹⁹ Arnold, *The Footprints*, pp. 93–135; Callahan, 'The Cult', p. 182.

²⁰ On the materiality and instrumentality of the sign of the cross, as well as a detailed discussion of relevant material objects and the pictorial imagery of this sign in the Carolingian period, see Kitzinger, *Cross*.

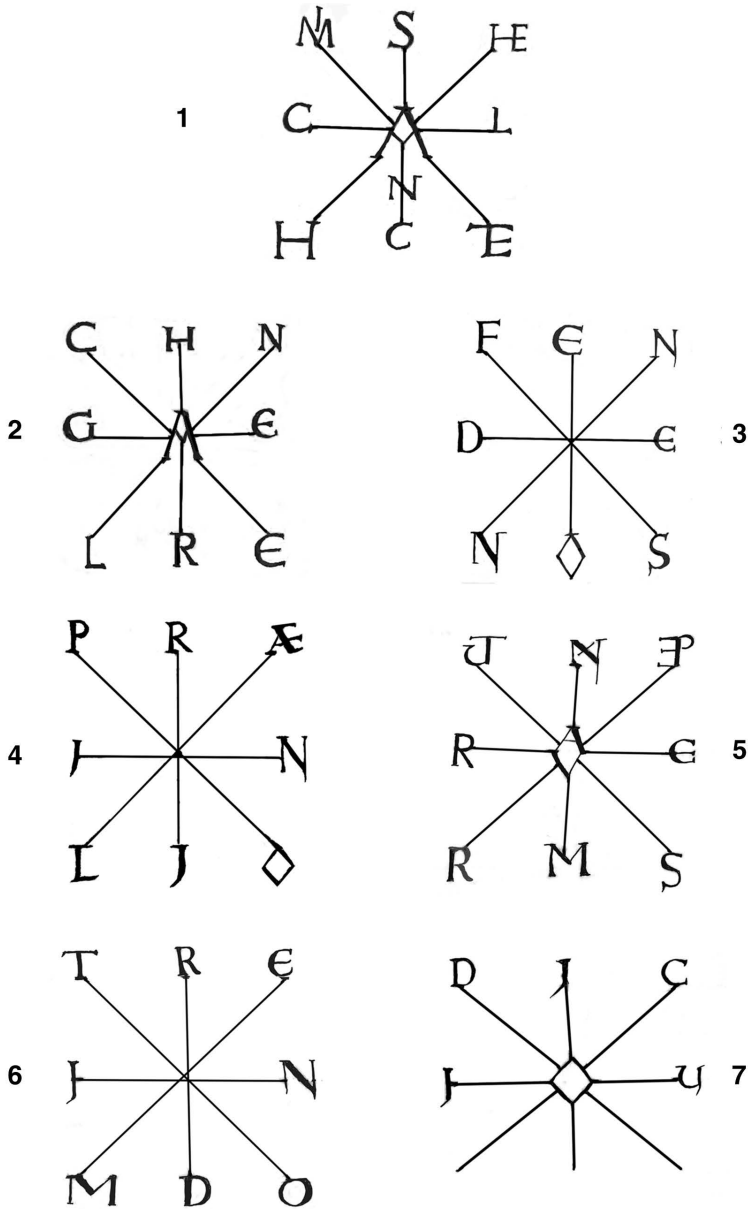


Fig. 9.4. Cruciform liturgical monograms from Paris, BnF, Ms. lat. 12272, fol. 104v. Graphic drawing.

presence of its sign across different media, accompanied by a drastic decrease in the symbolic use of late antique christograms.

As evidenced by the Frankish Gelasian sacramentaries, two liturgical feasts dedicated to the Cross were celebrated in the early Carolingian realm, namely those of

the Invention of the Cross (3 May) and the Exaltation of the Cross (September 14).²¹ The latter feast was probably introduced into papal Rome by the mid-seventh century, and was transmitted north of the Alps thereafter.²² The Adoration of the Cross also developed into a significant element of the Good Friday liturgy.²³ This expanding veneration of the cross thus reinforced existing liturgical practices as well as related theological tenets, and extant written evidence demonstrates that Carolingian clerical and lay intellectuals supported this liturgical veneration almost unanimously.²⁴

Manuscript pages provide arguably the best evidence for the unique role that the sign of the cross fulfilled in Carolingian visual culture. First of all, in the early Carolingian period, this graphic sign, frequently accompanied by suspended alpha and omega, could embellish the beginning of a codex or its major sections, which reminds us of similar, albeit more modest, practices in late antique manuscript culture. The cross thus 'sealed', as it were, the entrance to the sacred space of a religious book in the same manner as it delineated the sacred space of contemporary churches.²⁵ Furthermore, similar to late antique practices, this sign could also be employed on book covers, such as the 'earlier' back cover of the Lindau Gospels, crafted in the late eighth century.²⁶ Yet unlike late antique and Insular samples, cross pages in Continental Latin manuscripts produced in the eighth and the first half of the ninth centuries were not predominantly confined to gospel-books, but appeared in a diverse range of books, including sacramentaries, homiliaries, biblical commentaries, monastic rules, and even Christian histories.²⁷ As suggested by Bernhard Bischoff, this graphic form of book design, which had become especially popular in the early Carolingian period, gradually lost its appeal and, it seems, figural images of the crucified Christ increasingly substituted for it from the mid-ninth century onwards,²⁸—a development visibly marking the end of iconoclastic controversies in the early Middle Ages. The latter image also appears on the 'later'

²¹ See e.g. *Liber sacramentorum Gellonensis*, ed. Dumas and Deshusses, pp. 127–8, and 189–90.

²² For more details, see van Tongeren, *Exaltation*. Cf. Ó Carragáin, 'Interactions between Liturgy', pp. 184–8.

²³ For further details, see Chazelle, *The Crucified God*, pp. 30 and 139–40; and van Tongeren, 'Imagining the Cross'.

²⁴ Noble, *Images*, pp. 336–7. The only known exception is the decision by Bishop Claudius of Turin soon after 817 to remove crosses from the churches in his diocese in order to avoid excessive public reverence to them. This decision immediately sparked outcry on the part of many Frankish bishops and intellectuals (Noble, *Images*, pp. 288–312; and Chazelle, *The Crucified God*, pp. 120–5).

²⁵ For more details, see Kitzinger, *Cross*, pp. 69–73.

²⁶ Elbern, 'The "Earlier" Lindau Book Cover'; and Ganz, 'The Cross', pp. 258–62.

²⁷ A gospel-book: Paris, BnF, Ms. lat. 11959, fol. 20v (near Paris, s. IX¹, *Katalog*, no. 4717); a Gelasian sacramentary: Vatican City, BAV, Reg. lat. 316, fols 3v, 131v, 132v, 172v, 173r (near Paris, c.750, CLA, I.105); Alanus of Farfa's homiliary: Heidelberg, UB, Cod. Sal. X.12a, fol. 1v (northern Italy, c.800, CLA, 8.1119; *Katalog*, no. 1519); a collection of canons: Vatican City, BAV, Pal. lat. 574, fol. 2v (upper Rhine area, s. VIII–IX, *Katalog*, no. 6534); Augustine's commentaries: Paris, BnF, Ms. lat. 12168, fol. Cv (northern France, s. VIII, med., CLA, 5.630); the Rule of St Benedict: Munich, BSB, Clm. 19408, fol. 2r (southern Bavaria, s. VIII, ex., CLA, 9.1322); Orosius' history: Laon, BM, Ms. 137, fol. 1v (probably Laon, s. VIII med., CLA, 6.765).

²⁸ Bischoff, 'Kreuz'.

front cover of the Lindau Gospels, produced in the kingdom of Charles the Bald.²⁹ The two covers of this gospel-book thus epitomized this transition in a material form.

In most cases, book miniatures with a standing Latin cross occupy the entire page. Such a cross is usually embellished with medallions displaying figurative images—for example, the Lamb of God and the personifications of the four evangelists—or with exquisite ornament and jewels, or both. Such a decorative cross could also be accompanied by apotropaic, invocational, or acclamatory phrases and epithets positioned between their arms, such as *rex* (King), *lex* (Law), *lux* (Light), and *pax* (Peace)—the four words that end with the first letter of Christ's name and acclaim the divine attributes of the Lord (Fig. 9.5).³⁰ Furthermore, such richly decorated crosses were reminiscent of contemporaneous portable crucifixes, and were often framed by a structure that symbolized an altar baldachin or, more generally, a religious *fastigium*.³¹ Such depictions of the cross sign were not limited to manuscript culture, but also appear in material media related to ecclesiastical spaces, carved on stone surfaces and painted in frescoes.³²

These visual features underscored the unique role of those decorated crosses in the eyes of their beholders: in clerical eyes, they were capable of demarcating Christological space—a symbolic zone recreated during the liturgy of mass and connected to the sacred past, the liturgical present, and the apocalyptic future.³³ In the eyes of noble laymen, such decorated crosses probably preserved their original apotropaic qualities and their connection with triumphant power, as encapsulated by the phrase inscribed by the sides of the decorated cross at the beginning of the Antiphony of León—produced in the first half of the tenth century and marked with the personal monograms of kings of León slightly later³⁴—as well as in later copies of the Illustrated Beatus.³⁵ The phrase imitated, almost verbatim, the phrase that was inscribed on the Angel's Cross from the cathedrals of Oviedo, commissioned by King Alfonso II of Asturias in 808: *hoc signo tuetur pius, hoc signo vincitur inimicus* ('by this sign the pious is protected, by this sign the enemy is defeated').³⁶ The latter wording was clearly inspired by Eusebius of Caesarea's famous reference to the divine sign revealed to Constantine I before the Battle of the Milvian Bridge and became a popular motto in Christian Spain in the following centuries.

In continuation of the late antique manuscript tradition, the sign of the cross in Carolingian manuscripts could not only demarcate, but also, quite literally, structure

²⁹ Ganz, *Buch-Gewänder*, pp. 131–48.

³⁰ Heidelberg, UB, Cod. Sal. X.12a, fol. 1v. For further examples and detailed discussion, see Bischoff, 'Kreuz', pp. 284–6, 291–7, and 301–3.

³¹ For more details on this visual motif in the early Middle Ages, see Garipzanov, 'Fastigium'.

³² e.g. on the so-called *Priesterstein* in Mainz, Bischöfliches Dom- und Diözesanmuseum, inv. no. PS00164, produced c.850, and in a fresco in the Church of San Julien de los Prados in Oviedo dated to 791–842.

³³ As e.g. in the tenth-century Spanish manuscripts of Beatus of Liébana's commentaries; see New York, ML, Ms. M. 644, fol. 219r (probably Tábara, c.940–5; Williams, *The Illustrated Beatus*, vol. 2, pp. 21–33, fig. 100).

³⁴ León, Archivo Cathedralico, Ms. 8, fol. 5v; De Luca, 'Royal Misattribution'.

³⁵ Valladolid, Biblioteca de la Universidad, Ms. 433, fol. 1v (Kingdom of León, 970, Williams, *The Illustrated Beatus*, vol. 2, pp. 38–42, fig. 151).

³⁶ Schlunk, *Las cruces*; Kitzinger, *Cross*, pp. 90–2.



Fig. 9.5. Cross page in Heidelberg, UB, Cod. Sal. X.12a, fol. 1v.

textual space—as, for example, in a mid-eighth-century manuscript containing Orosius' *Histories*, in which the lines of a dedicatory poem to Augustine of Hippo form a Latin cross.³⁷ The cross-shaped texts thus became para-signs, providing a wider conceptual framework of reference to written words; in the Bible of Theodulf, for example, an introductory text explaining the nature of the Old and New Testaments (Isidore, *Etymologiae*, 4.1) is written in golden ink on a purple page in

³⁷ Laon, BM, Ms. 137, fol. 4v.

the form of a cross. Similarly, the final explicit at the end of the manuscript is arranged inside a medallion to create the same cruciform structure.³⁸ The choice of this graphic form and the absence of any figural image in the Bible produced for the powerful bishop of Orléans was in no way accidental. In a similar manner, he employed the sign of the cross as well as the lozenge as the main structural principle in the graphic design of his *carmen figuratum* addressed to Charlemagne.³⁹ After all, Theodulf stated in the 790s, in the so-called *Libri Carolini*, that the cross sign was superior to any figural image, because this sign invoked the great mystery embodied by its holy prototype, because it functioned as a triumphant weapon against the Devil or any other adversary, and because it had become the badge of authority (*insigne*) for the Carolingian ruler (*nostri imperatoris*), Charlemagne.⁴⁰

In a similar demarcating function, smaller Latin crosses with suspended alpha and omega occasionally appeared before some incipits,⁴¹ above canon tables, and on the top of, or inside, decorated frames enclosing text in Carolingian liturgical manuscripts;⁴² this practice became especially widespread in the ninth century with a decreasing use of full-page cross pages. In some luxurious gospel-books and Bibles produced in the ninth-century royal abbey of St Martin of Tours, monastic masters also replaced or complemented such small Latin crosses with a peculiar cruciform monogram of Jesus Christ. The latter graphic device was doubtless created in imitation of contemporary cruciform monograms and incorporated the letters of the corresponding *nomina sacra*, IHS XPS (Fig. 9.6a).⁴³ Furthermore, the letter chi was placed at the middle of this graphic device, thus incorporating an eight-armed radiating cross within its structure. This innovative deployment of the monogrammatic *nomina sacra* of Jesus Christ once again exemplified the popularity of cruciform monograms in concurrent scribal culture, and emphasized the intrinsic connection between the sign of the cross and more direct references to the heavenly King in contemporary visual culture. Indeed, commenting on Psalm 4.7 around the same time, the monastic intellectual Walafrid Strabo (c.809–49) made

³⁸ Paris, BnF, Ms. lat. 9380, fols 3r and 347r (Orleans or Fleury, s. IX, in., CLA, 5.576; *Katalog*, no. 4572). A similar use of cross-shaped frames for religious texts can be found in contemporary manuscripts from Coptic Egypt; see New York, ML, Ms. M. 566, fol. 41r (Egypt, 822/3–913/4). See also an earlier example of a cross-shaped colophon in a seventh-century Syriac gospel-book from Wolfenbüttel (HAB, Cod. Guelf. 3.1.3.300 Aug. 2°, fol. 284v) and its discussion in Kitzinger, *Cross*, pp. 327–8. For further examples, see Bischoff, 'Kreuz', p. 299.

³⁹ Theodulf, *carmina*, XXIII, ed. Dümmler, pp. 480–2. See also Ernst, *Carmen figuratum*, pp. 188–97; Chazelle, *The Crucified God*, p. 21. The poem's graphic structure imitated one of Alcuin's *carmina figurata* written slightly earlier.

⁴⁰ *Opus Caroli regis*, 2.28, ed. Freeman and Meyvaert, pp. 296–300. For more details, see Freeman, 'Scripture', p. 194. See also Chazelle, *The Crucified God*, pp. 39–52; and Noble, *Images*, pp. 162–215.

⁴¹ e.g. Chartres, BM, Ms. 40, fol. 57r (France, s. VIII med., CLA, 6.745); Paris, BnF, Ms. lat. 17227, fol. 6v (Tours, s. IX, 1/3, *Katalog*, no. 4998; cf. KM, vol. 1.1, p. 369: 796–804); Vienna, ÖNB, Cod. 449, fol. 1r (Cologne, c.870–89, *Katalog*, no. 7121).

⁴² e.g. Abbeville, BM, Ms. 4, fol. 102r; London, BL, Harley Ms. 2788, fols 6v–11v, 12v, 72r, 162r (Court School of Charlemagne, s. IX, 1/4, CLA, 2.198; *Katalog*, no. 2456); St Gallen, SB, Cod. Sang. 75, pp. 694 (Tours, 796–804, CLA, 7.904; *Katalog*, no. 5547); Autun, BM, Ms. lat. 19 bis, fol. 2r (Tours, 844/5, *Katalog*, no. 156).

⁴³ Paris, BnF, Ms. lat. 17227, fols 68r and 110r; London, BL, Add. Ms. 10546, fols 7r, 285r, 370r, 431r, and 441v (c.830–40, *Katalog*, no. 2360).

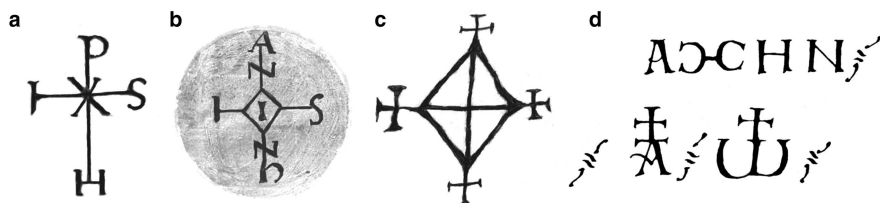


Fig. 9.6. Graphic devices in Carolingian manuscripts: a) IHS XPS monogram from Tours manuscripts; b) IOHANNIS monogram from Paris, BnF, Ms. lat. 266, fol. 172r; c) cruciform device from Leiden, Universiteitsbibliotheek, VLO.41, fol. 19v; d) crosses from Munich, BSB, Clm. 6270a, fol. 154r.

the same point in plain words: ‘The cross is stamped upon us, as the sign of our King; it [the cross] is the light of His appearance since God shines in a such special way’ (*Crux nobis impressa est, in signum regis nostri, quae est lumen vultus: quia in talibus radiat Deus*).⁴⁴

As exemplified by the Gospels of Lothar created for this Carolingian ruler c.849–51, the monastic masters in Tours could employ other visual strategies to highlight the significance of the IHS XPS monogrammatic device, namely through the use of golden ink, through its placement within a purple medallion, or through the addition of suspended alpha and omega.⁴⁵ The cruciform monogram of Jesus Christ in this manuscript functions almost like the diplomatic seal of the Divine Lord confirming the sacred nature of Gospels as the living Word of God. The first page of the Gospel of John is especially instructive in this regard. In addition to the full page initial I, this page is stamped, as it were, with four golden seals (fol. 172r). The top one displays the cruciform monogram of the Gospel’s author (IOHANNIS), with a typically Carolingian lozenge O at the middle (Fig. 9.6b), but different from the cruciform monogram of this apostle in the *De inventione litterarum*. The sign at the middle of the page shows an eight-arm star (thus visualizing one of the Lord’s epithets, *lux*), whereas the two lower seals feature a chi-rho and the cruciform monogram of IHS XPS. The latter seals are located under the last line of John, 1.1—*et deus erat verbum*—and may also be seen as a visual commentary on God being Word.

This IHS XPS monogram appears in the margins of a gospel-book produced somewhere in Brittany c.800, where it is included in a peculiar list of Christian graphic devices such as a chi-rho and a cruciform monogram, which probably encoded the name *Emmanuhel* (meaning ‘God with us’).⁴⁶ Yet these marginal notes were probably added later in that century, since similar forms of the cruciform monogrammatic *nomina sacra* of Jesus Christ were also drawn in two manuscripts (containing a gospel-book and the grammatical work of Priscian) produced

⁴⁴ *Commentary in Psalms*, 4. 7, col. 849D.

⁴⁵ Paris, BnF, Ms. lat. 266, fols 14v, 15r, 71r (*Katalog*, no. 3980).

⁴⁶ Paris, BnF, Ms. Nouv. Acq. lat. 1587, fol. 47r (*Katalog*, no. 5092).

in that region in the late ninth century or slightly later.⁴⁷ So, in all likelihood, the IHS XPS graphic device was created by clerical masters in St Martin of Tours around the turn or in the first third of the ninth century, which is unsurprising considering its list of abbots in those decades. This list featured the probable inventor of Charlemagne's monogram, Hitherius (775–91), Charlemagne's closest advisor, Alcuin (796–804), and an Anglo-Saxon student of Alcuin, Fridugis (807–34); the latter was also the archchancellor of Louis the Pious from 819 to 832.⁴⁸ The Jesus Christ's cruciform monogram was invented during the abbacy of one of the two latter abbots, most likely independently from the monogrammatic tradition of the *De inventione litterarum*. But the sign's overall design was similarly inspired by the popularity and preeminence of the cross sign and cruciform monograms in coeval scribal culture, and at the Carolingian court in particular.

Similar to sixth- and seventh-century scribal practices, more schematic cross symbols (so-called Greek crosses with equal arms) appeared elsewhere in Western European manuscripts after the mid-eighth century. They could mark incipits and explicits,⁴⁹ or could function as the central element of a decorated initial.⁵⁰ Used as symbols, such crosses could be combined with other symbolic elements, as, for instance, in a late ninth-century manuscript containing Eutiches' *Ars de verbo*, written in north-eastern France. A distinctive cross symbol introduces the incipit of the second book of this text: the graphic device features four small crosses at the ends of its arms and a central lozenge borrowed from contemporary Carolingian diplomatic monograms (Fig. 9.6c).⁵¹ A manuscript containing Jerome's *Expositio in Isaia*, produced in Freising in the second quarter of the ninth century, displays in its colophon another creative amalgam of cross signs with relevant graphic elements: beneath the final explicit line the word *Amen* appears in Greek along with an alpha and omega, both symbolic letters surmounted by cross signs (Fig. 9.6d).⁵²

The multifaceted presence of the sign of the cross in Carolingian manuscript culture was accompanied by a noticeable decrease in a similar symbolic use of chi-rhos, tau-rhos, and iota-chis. Staurograms or monogrammatic crosses, so fashionable in late antiquity, were increasingly replaced by decorative crosses or crosses with suspended apocalyptic letters. As for the chi-rho and iota-chi, with a few exceptions,⁵³

⁴⁷ Paris, BnF, Ms. lat. 258, fol. 8v (s. IX, $\frac{3}{4}$, *Katalog*, no. 3972); Paris, BnF, Ms. lat. 10290, fols 3r, 10v, 40v, 195r, 196v, 197v, and 198r (s. IX, $\frac{4}{4}$, *Katalog*, no. 4623).

⁴⁸ KM, vol. 1.1, pp. 15–21.

⁴⁹ For incipits, see e.g. Wolfenbüttel, HAB, Cod. Guelf. 67 Weiss., fol. 1v (around Weissenburg, s. IX¹, *Katalog*, no. 7413), Leiden, Universiteitsbibliotheek, VLF 26, fol. 1r (Amiens, s. IX, $\frac{1}{3}$, *Katalog*, no. 2188). For explicits, see e.g. Karlsruhe, Badische Landesbibliothek, Aug. Perg. 229, fol. 140v (around Chieti, c.821, *Katalog*, no. 1719).

⁵⁰ Munich, BSB, Clm. 14300, fols 1v, 40r, and 69r (Salzburg, s. VIII–IX, *Katalog*, no. 3150); Paris, BnF, Ms. lat. 12048, fols 76v (Meaux, s. VIII, ex., CLA, 5.618); Wolfenbüttel, HAB, Cod. Guelf. 81.17 Aug. 2°, fol. 30r (probably St Bertin, s. IX¹, *Katalog*, no. 7287).

⁵¹ Leiden, Universiteitsbibliotheek, VLO 41, fol. 19v (*Katalog*, no. 2248).

⁵² Munich, BSB, Clm. 6270a, fol. 154r (Bischoff, *Die südostdeutschen Schreibschulen*, vol. 1, p. 105; *Katalog*, no. 3020).

⁵³ For the symbolic use of the iota-chi, see e.g. Oxford, Merton College, Ms. 315, fol. 125v (Alemannia, s. IX, $\frac{3}{4}$, *Katalog*, no. 3875). For the symbolic use of the chi-rho, see e.g. Paris, BnF,

these signs mostly functioned as scribal or critical signs relegated to the margins of codices. Such technical usage resulted from a burgeoning interest in classical and late antique technical signs in Carolingian manuscript culture, exemplified by their use in textual criticism and by the numerous copies of various treatises describing these signs and their meanings. Such tracts were produced from the second half of the eighth century onwards—for example, within relevant sections of Isidore of Seville's *Etymologiae* and the introductory list of such signs in Cassiodorus' *Commentaries in Psalms* (Fig. 9.7).⁵⁴ According to the latter list, a chrismon/*chresimon* (identical in its visual form with the chi-rho) marked very important dogmas (*in dogmatis valde necessariis*); a *frontis*, which was occasionally drawn like a tau-rho, flagged definitions (*in definitionibus*); and a sign reminiscent of an iota-chi was

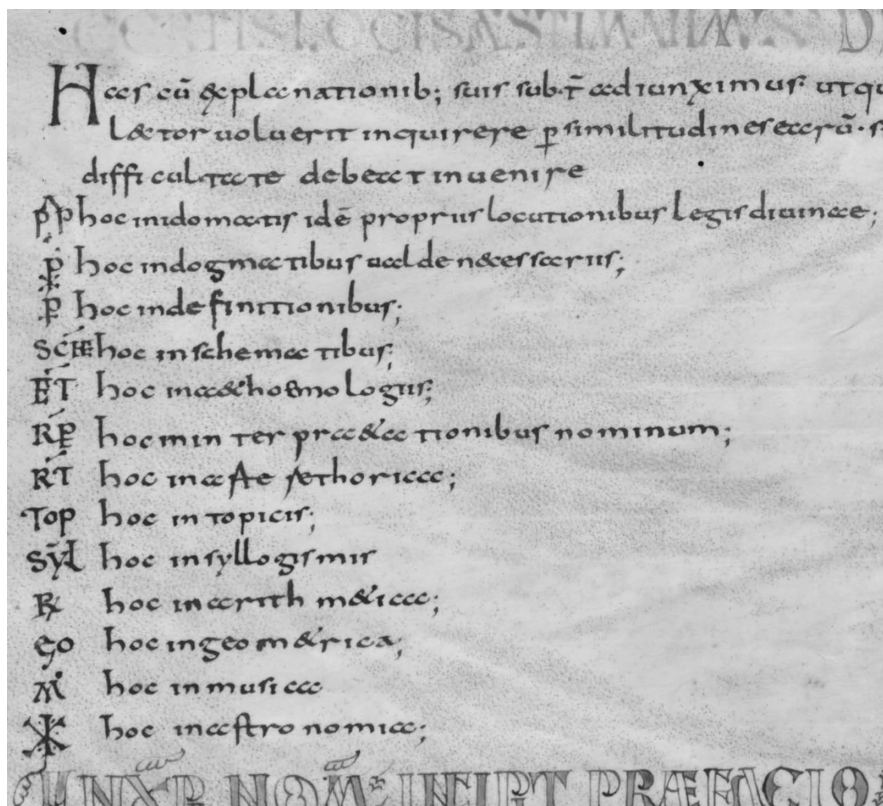


Fig. 9.7. Technical signs in Schaffhausen, Stadtbibliothek, Ms. 78, fol. 1v.

Ms. lat. 12048, fol. 1v (Cambrai or Meaux, the 790s, CLA, 5.618; *Katalog*, no. 4725a); Nancy, Cathedral Treasury, St Gauzelin Gospels, fol. 2v (Tours, c.835, *Katalog*, no. 3571, KM, 1.1, pp. 179–86). For the symbolic use of the tau-rho, see London, BL, Cotton Ms. Caligula A XV, fol. 37r (northern France, s. IX², *Katalog*, no. 2417).

⁵⁴ For a detailed discussion, see Steinova, *Notam*, pp. 121–51; and Steinova, 'Psalms'.

supposed to identify astronomical passages (*in astronomia*).⁵⁵ Yet the meaning of these scribal marks in contemporary scribal culture was not static: for example, Carolingian scribes could also employ the chrismon in its original classical function, namely as an attention mark in literary texts.⁵⁶

In the Carolingian period, the symbolic usage of cross signs was not limited to religious manuscripts but can also be observed in various diagrams drawn inside works of an encyclopaedic nature, such as Isidore's *Etymologiae* and *De natura rerum*, Boethius' *De institutione arithmetica*, or Cassiodorus' *Institutiones*. Whereas the earth's division into three continents (Europe, Asia, and Africa) was presented to a contemplative eye in the form of a tau-cross (Fig. 9.8),⁵⁷ the equal-armed cross was imprinted into the structure of various cosmological, computistical, and wind

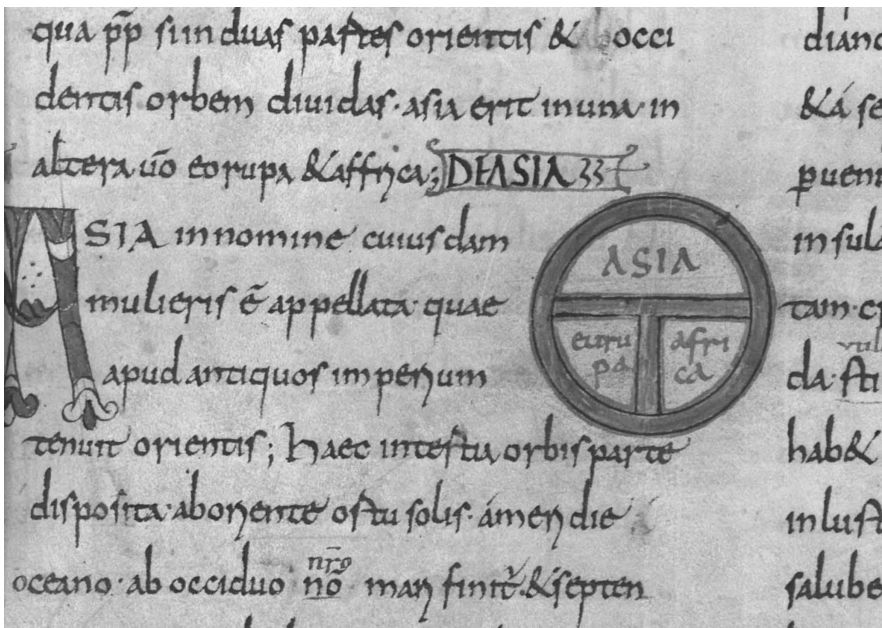


Fig. 9.8. T-O map in Munich, BSB, Clm. 6250, fol. 208r.

⁵⁵ See e.g. Schaffhausen, Stadtbibliothek, Ms. 78, fol. 1v (St Gall, s. VIII–IX, CLA, 7.1002); Wolfenbüttel, HAB, Cod. Guelf. 4 Weiss, fol. 1v (Weissenburg, s. IX, ¼, *Katalog*, no. 7367). On Cassiodorus' graphic symbols, see Steinova, *Notam*, pp. 49–50 and 326.

⁵⁶ See e.g. a scribal comment on such a technical usage of the chrismon in a psalter copied in Milan: 'Hec quidem ex voluntate scriptoris ad aliquid notandum ponitur', Munich, BSB, Clm. 343, fol. 6v (s. IX, ¾, *Katalog*, no. 2925). For more details, see Steinova, *Notam*, pp. 212–13 and 312.

⁵⁷ See e.g. Munich, BSB, Clm. 6250, fol. 208r (Freising, c.810–20, *Katalog*, no. 3006); Bamberg, Staatsbibliothek, Msc.Nat. 1, fol. 43v (eastern France, s. IX, ½); London, BL, Harley Ms. 2686, fol. 145r (probably western France, s. IX, ¾, *Katalog*, no. 2447); Verdun, BM, Ms. 26, fol. 69r (perhaps Burgundy, s. IX, c.¾, *Katalog*, no. 7022); Reims, BM, Ms. 425, fol. 137v (Reims, s. IX, med., *Katalog*, no. 5295); Paris, BnF, Ms. lat. 7583, fol. 136r (northern France, s. IX, med., *Katalog*, no. 4484); Munich, BSB, Clm. 396, fols 16r, 34r (Brittany or Wales, s. IX, ex., *Katalog*, no. 2927). For more details and references on this symbolic design, see Dalché, 'L'héritage', pp. 54–66; Carruthers, *The Craft*, p. 210.



Fig. 9.9. Denier of Louis the Pious (Dorestad, 822–40). Oslo University, Museum of Cultural History.

rotae, as well as diagrams of other forms.⁵⁸ The sign of the cross with or without an alpha and omega could also be drawn inside the central medallion of such diagrams,⁵⁹ or manifested in a central location by cross-shaped words important for diagrammatic design.⁶⁰

The ubiquitous presence of cross signs in Carolingian manuscripts circulating among clergy and lay nobility corresponded to the public visibility of the sign of the cross to laity of lower status on royal coinage after the monetary reform of 792/3. Charlemagne's post-reform coins were sealed, so to speak, by the cruciform monogram of the earthly king on one side, and the sign of the heavenly King on the other. These numismatic features visualized to the coins' users, by graphic means, the transcendent source of royal authority. In keeping with the words of Theodulf written in these years, the cross sign was thus displayed almost as a royal insignia,⁶¹ comparable to the triumphant chi-rho of the Constantinian dynasty. After this reform, the cross sign functioned as a permanent coin type on ninth-century Carolingian coinage, accompanied by smaller crosses in numismatic legends (Fig. 9.9). Moreover, the same sign became the main form of ornamentation on Carolingian dress accessories, such as ninth-century copper-alloy cross-enamel and cross-shaped brooches. These mass-produced material objects must have become a popular everyday female dress accessory, since they have been found across a broad

⁵⁸ See e.g. Laon, BM, Ms. 423, fols 5v, 6v, 7r, 8r, 12r, 43v (Laon, s. VIII, CLA, 6.766); Bamberg, Staatsbibliothek, Msc.Patr. 61, fol. 87r; Munich, BSB, Clm. 14300, fols 5v, 8r, 18v (Salzburg, s. VIII–IX, CLA, 9.1294; *Katalog*, no. 3150); Bamberg, Staatsbibliothek, Msc.Class. 5, fol. 28r (Tours, c.845, *Katalog*, no. 204); Karlsruhe, Badische Landesbibliothek, Aug. Perg. 229, fol. 175r. On Carolingian diagrams and their design, see Obrist, 'Wind Diagrams'; Obrist, *La cosmologie*; Kühnel, *The End*; Kühnel, 'Carolingian Diagrams'; and Eastwood, *Ordering the Heavens*.

⁵⁹ Cambrai, BM, Ms. 937, fol. 53v (France, s. VIII, ex., CLA, 6.744; *Katalog*, no. 809a); Karlsruhe, Badische Landesbibliothek, Aug. Perg. 241, fol. 9r (perhaps northern Italy, s. IX, $\frac{2}{3}$, *Katalog*, no. 1727).

⁶⁰ Munich, BSB, Clm. 210, fols 132r–v (Salzburg, c.818, *Katalog*, no. 2923); Vienna, ÖNB, Cod. 387, fol. 134r (Salzburg, c.818; *Katalog*, no. 7114).

⁶¹ 'Hoc est signum nostri imperatoris...', quod ad proelium nostrae sequuntur cohortes', *Opus Caroli regis*, 2.28, ed. Freeman and Meyvaert, p. 296.

swathe of north-western Europe.⁶² Furthermore, by this time, the sign of the cross had also become a default form of *signum manus* (signature) for predominantly male witnesses in contemporary private charters.⁶³ In these contexts, the cross sign might still have been viewed as a promise of salvation, but, more importantly, it functioned as a sign of salient religious identity for men and women of all walks of life. In short, this primordial Christian symbol of divine authority was not limited to ecclesiastical spaces, but left a powerful imprint on other public venues of social interaction.

9.3. HRABANUS MAURUS' *IN HONOREM SANCTAE CRUCIS*: THE SIGN OF THE CROSS AS THE MAIN ORGANIZING PRINCIPLE OF CAROLINGIAN GRAPHICACY

Considering the supreme importance of the sign of the cross in Carolingian culture, it is unsurprising that this symbol functioned as the primary blueprint for different forms of Carolingian graphicacy. As mentioned above, it underpinned the design of Carolingian diagrams and T–O maps. Furthermore, it became the main organizing principle for another form of early graphicacy revived at Charlemagne's royal court in the late eighth century, namely *versus intexti* (visual poetry).⁶⁴ Sometime between the late 780s and 800, the Anglo-Saxon intellectual Alcuin presented Charlemagne with six visual poems that he had composed with his pupil, Joseph the Scot, inspired by the example set by Porphyrius who had sent his *carmina figurata* to Emperor Constantine almost five centuries earlier.⁶⁵ Yet unlike Porphyrius with his particular emphasis on the chi-rho, the two Carolingian-era poets followed the footsteps of early medieval Christian authors such as Venantius Fortunatus and Boniface by making the cross sign a major structural principle in the visual layout of their collection, complemented by the lozenge in some visual poems. The symbolic importance of the cross sign was further highlighted by the fact that the first poem by Alcuin and the final one by Joseph were dedicated to that symbol's ultimate prototype, the Holy Cross.

These poems can be read against the broader backdrop of the use of the sign of the cross in Carolingian visual culture. For example, Alcuin's poem starts with the phrase *crux, decus es mundi* ('cross, you are the ornament/glory of the world'),⁶⁶ which finds a visual parallel in the occasional embellishment of the central medalion of Carolingian cosmological *rotae* with the cross sign or the cruciform graphic

⁶² For more details and references, see Pedersen, 'Late Viking and Early Medieval Ornaments', pp. 204–5.

⁶³ For further details and references, see Garipzanov, *Symbolic Language*, pp. 180–1 and 216.

⁶⁴ For a detailed discussion of Carolingian visual poetry and relevant bibliography, see Ernst, *Carmen figuratum*, pp. 168–387.

⁶⁵ The Insular origins of Alcuin and Joseph hint at the importance of the earlier Insular tradition of *versus intexti* as influential sources of inspiration too.

⁶⁶ *Alcuini carmina*, VI, ed. Dümmler, pp. 224–5.

device created by the criss-crossing words *mundus* and *cosmos*.⁶⁷ Furthermore, Joseph's final visual poem displays the three crosses of Golgotha inside a Christian basilica, with the text encoded by the crosses exemplifying the connection of these signs to the sacred past, liturgical present, and apocalyptic future (Fig. 9.10). The two smaller crosses symbolized the two choices that confronted everybody in the early medieval West. These choices were epitomized by the contrasting fates of the two robbers crucified alongside Jesus (Luke, 23, 33–43), one accepting Him as the Lord and taken to heaven, and the other scornfully rejecting Him and therefore subjected to eternal damnation: on the left side, *crux vita salus credentis* ('the cross is life [and] salvation to a believer'); and on the right side, *crux mors poena negantis* ('the cross is death [and] punishment to a disbeliever'). A much higher cross at the middle, visualizing the Cross of Jesus, enshrined the text that emphasized the intrinsic connection of any cross sign with the prototype, as well as its salvific power: *sancta crucis semper salvet inscriptio corda* ('the inscribing of the cross always saves the pious hearts').⁶⁸ Through graphicacy, Joseph thus masterfully presented a reenactment of sacred history within the ecclesiastical space of the liturgical present, a reenactment promising salvation at the time of the Second Coming of the Lord.

The visual poems of Alcuin and Joseph commenced a series of other Carolingian *versus intexti* and acrostic poems, and the sign of the cross structured most of them. One such acrostic poem appears in a manuscript with Gregory's *Regula pastoralis*, produced somewhere in north-eastern France in the first half of the ninth century (Fig. 9.11).⁶⁹ It is written after the list of chapters, which is preceded by two full-page images of the cross framed by liturgical phrases used for the veneration of the Cross.⁷⁰ The anonymous poem looks deceptively simple compared to the *carmina figurata*. Yet to a discerning eye, it will unfold as a complex poetic diagram: it encodes layers of conceptual information that can only be understood by analysing the spatial positions of different poetic lines, and by decoding the hidden text encrypted by letters at the ends of poetic lines, letters that are four times as large as the other phonetic characters in this poetic cypher.

The four lines creating its outer frame refer symbolically to the four sides of the world:

On the top: Dispicit omnipotens culmen surgentis Eoi.
 On the left side: Dat deus Arcturo ut vehemens stet nec ruat umquam.
 On the bottom: Mirificas plantas felix colit Hesperus agni.
 On the right side: Invisum servans dominus centrum rotat austri.
 The Almighty looks down at the summit of the rising Eous.
 God makes the vehement Arcturus stay still and not ever fall down.
 The happy Hesperus takes care of the marvellous sprouts for the Lamb.
 The watchful Lord rotates the invisible centre of Auster.

⁶⁷ London, BL, Harley Ms. 3017, fol. 128v (France, s. IX, $\frac{3}{4}$, *Katalog*, no. 2466); Rouen, BM, Ms. 524, fol. 75r (probably Normandy, after 814, *Katalog*, no. 5377).

⁶⁸ *Iosephi Scotti carmina*, VI, ed. Dümmler, pp. 158–9; Ernst, *Carmen figuratum*, pp. 186–7.

⁶⁹ Paris, BnF, Ms. lat. 12262, fol. 3r (*Katalog*, no. 4802).

⁷⁰ For details and references on these features of the manuscript, see Kitzinger, *Cross*, pp. 79–82.

INCLYTASICUPIASSAN**C**TISUBCULMINATEMPLI
 VELLAETASSEDESINT**RARE**PATENTIBUSASTRIS
 COETIBUSETCURASS**UPERUM**TEIUNGERELECTOR
 ENITERESTCERTUM**X**PICRU**X**QUAEQUERECLUDIS
 FULGIDACAELO**RUM**RESERAN**DOLIM**INASANCTIS
 HUMANIENGENER**I**S**PER**QUAM**D**E**U**ICERATHOSTEM
 DUMPIUSALTIT**H**RONOIESUS**D**E**C**ULMINEPATRIS
 UENERATETPR**I**NCEPSHUMANOSS**UM**SERATARTUS
 ACTERRAEFA**C**TORCAELI**QUE**MARI**S**QUECREATOR
 MIRIFICOT**E**NERAEESTCARNISUEL**A**TUSAMICTU
 NUMINATAR**T**AREAEUELLETDUMPER**D**EREMORTIS
 HOCXRIS**T**USSIGNOIN**F**ANDOSA**U**ERTIT**E**TACTUS
 UINCUL**A**DISRUMPIT**F**AT**I**SINPRAESAN**E**FANDIS
 SICHOS**T**ILENEFASUIN**C**ITSERPENTE**P**ER**R**EMPTO
 PECC**A**T**I**QUECAPUTTUM**N**IGRISABDIDITAN**T**RIS
 INCL**Y**TAQUAPROPTER**U**ARIATISCARMINAM**U**SIS
 LA**U**RIGERAE**QUE****CRUCISEMPER**DEUOTACAN**E**MUS
 IP**S**ABONISHOMINUMPR**A**EBETPRAECONIA**U**OT**I**S
 PA**X**HONORATQUESALUS**L**UXSUMMOFULGIDAD**O**NO
 MOR**S**QUASAEUAFUGIT**D**ULCISETUITARE**U**ERTIT
 EX**I**MIOHANCTOTUS**U**EN**E**RABITU**R**ORBISHON**O**RE
 ET**S**IMULHAEC**H**OMINUM**T**UTANDOUOTARE**S**ER**U**AT
 NE**T**URBANSANIMUMRAP**I**ATINCRIMINASER**P**ENS
 PR**I**MASALUS**C**UNCTISIN**T**EPER**F**E**C**TAPERENN**I**S
 POS**T**EAQUAM**R**ECTORTES**C**ANDIT**G**RATASUP**R**EMO
 QU**A**E**F**ULGIS**U**OTOMEDI**C**INAESPR**U**MTADOL**O**RUM
 INCL**Y**TACRU**X**SALUE**P**ER**T**EESTPA**X**UERARE**L**ATA
 UI**R**TUS**U**ITASALUS**H**OM**I**NUM**M**OR**S**POENA**D**IAB**L**I
 QV**A**PROPTER**C**URRITSUP**P**LEXQUIN**P**ACISOR**I**GO
 INT**V**AMEN**S**PROPERAN**S**TOTIS**P**RA**E**CONIA**U**EL**I**S
 QV**A**ERITETA**E**TERNAES**I**BIUITAE**G**AUDIALA**E**TA
 TU**C**A**E**LESTE**D**ECUSCIT**O**PRIMAPI**A**CLATUL**I**ST**I**
 AU**R**EALUXSA**E**CLISSAN**C**TISSIMA**N**OTAPROB**A**TA
 CR**U**XUEREUE**N**ERANDAP**O**TENS**P**RET**I**OSAVAL**E**TO
 FR**O**NDICOMOT**U**LERAT**P**RIMUMTEU**I**SCERESA**C**RO
 FR**R**UGIFERO**C**ISPESLAUD**A**NTMODOS**I**DERACAE**L**O
E **S** **A** **S** **O**

Fig. 9.10. *Carmen figuratum* of Joseph the Scot, from *Iosephi Scotti carmina*, VI, ed. Dümmler, p. 159.

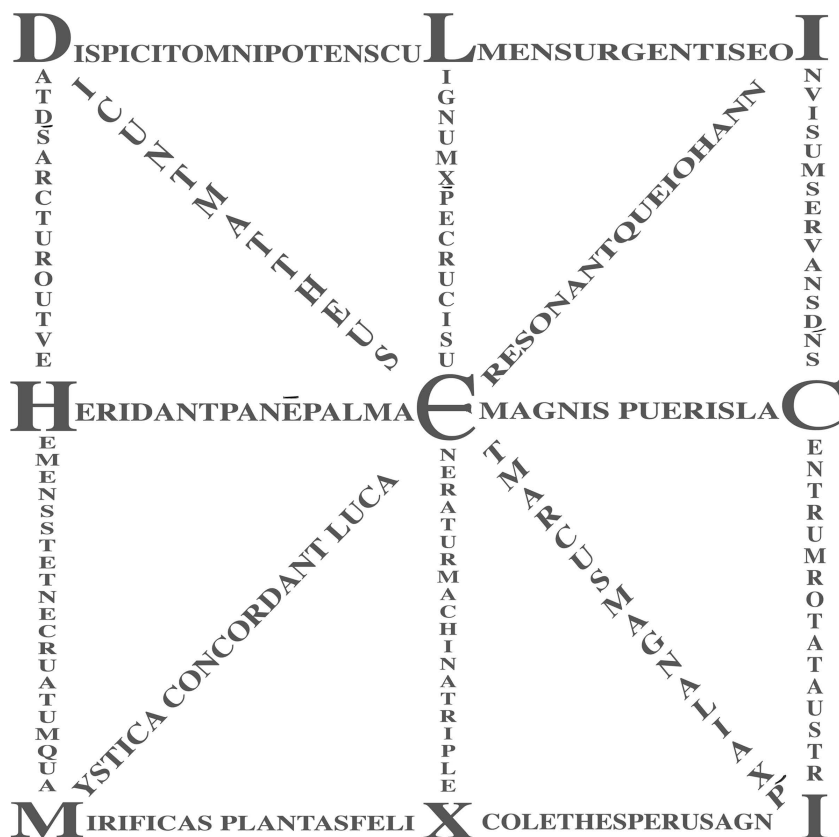


Fig. 9.11. Acrostic poem from Paris, BnF, Ms. lat. 12262, fol. 3r. Graphic drawing.

The morning star Eous and the evening star Hesperus are metonymies for the east and the west respectively. The brightest star of the northern hemisphere, Arcturus, refers symbolically to the north, whereas the southern wind Auster is a metaphor for the south. All four sides of the world thus bear witness to God. Furthermore, symbolic references to each side correspond exactly to their location on early medieval *mappa mundi* and diagrammatic representations of the world with the east located on the top, the west on the bottom, the south on the right side, and the north on the left.⁷¹ The four poetic lines therefore delineate not only the field of the poem but also the diagrammatic representation of the world with an eight-armed cross at its middle, which became a widespread organizing principle for monograms in the first half of the ninth century.

The final four poetic lines creating this inner graphic device indicate that the educated viewer could have seen this graphic device as a combination of the cross sign and the letter chi referring to Christ, similar to the design of the IHS XPS

⁷¹ For more details and references, see Garipzanov, 'The Rise of Graphicity', pp. 12–16.

monogram. The horizontal and vertical arms of the cross directly invoke Christ and provide poetic references to its sacred prototype, its intrinsic connection to the Holy Trinity, and the theology of Crucifixion.

From the left to the right: *Heri dant panem palmae, magnis pueris lac.*

From the top to the bottom: *Lignum, Christe, crucis veneratur machina triplex.*

The lords provided the bread to the palm (i.e. victory), milk to a great number of servants.

O Christ, the 'Triple Device' [i.e. Trinity] is venerated in the wood of the Cross.

The two diagonal lines of the letter chi then name the four evangelists praising the deeds of Jesus Christ, as if they were singers in a church choir.

From the upper left corner: *Dicunt Mattheus et Marcus magnalia Christi*

From the lower left corner: *Mystica, concordant Lucae, resonantque Iohanni.*

Matthew and Mark tell the sacred feats of Christ,

In unison with Luke and in resonance with John.

The entire graphic structure visualizes the words of St Paul well known in the Carolingian world (Galatians, 6.14) and later incorporated into liturgical hymns, 'The world has been crucified to me through him, and I have been crucified to the world' (*per quem mihi mundus crucifixus est et ego mundo*).⁷² In addition to the above interplay between graphic forms and poetic lines, the larger letters, also highlighted with bright colours, provide a third layer of meaning. Their decoding first follows the lines of the cross and thereafter of the chi, and they present the phrase *hec lex Dei mei* ('here is the law of my God'). The phrase could be seen as summarizing this poetic representation of the world and its sacred history in a diagrammatic form. At the same time, it provides an authoritative dictum on the following text, the rules of pastoral care that every cleric had to abide by and obey.

This brief foray into Carolingian poetic graphicacy and its complete dependence on the sign of the cross cannot bypass Alcuin's pupil in the art of visual poetry, Hrabanus Maurus, whose opus *In honorem sanctae crucis* is the only early medieval work in this genre that can be compared in its scope, complexity, and innovative design to the exemplary late antique *versus intexti* of Porphyrius. The unique graphic nature of Hrabanus' work no doubt contributed to its popularity in medieval literary culture from the ninth century onwards, as attested by numerous surviving manuscripts and their widespread provenance in Western Europe. In this poetic work completed in Fulda in 813/4 and augmented in the following decades with additional dedicatory *versus intexti* to Pope Gregory IV (827–44) and Emperor Louis the Pious, one of the brightest intellectuals of the Carolingian age expounded on the myriad of symbolic meanings and connotations related to the sign of the cross. As such Hrabanus elevated the veneration of the cross, by means of graphicacy, to a level unparalleled in the early Middle Ages. Yet his *In honorem sanctae crucis* was a masterpiece of graphicacy designed exclusively for reception amongst

⁷² See e.g. *Opus Caroli regis*, 2.28, ed. Freeman and Meyvaert, p. 298; and the Antiphony of León: León, Archivo Cathedralico, Ms. 8, fol. 40r.

the contemporary intellectual elite. And even for this narrow circle of highly educated viewers and readers, Hrabanus had to write not only the *declaratio figurae* explaining each *versus intextus* on the opposite page, but also to paraphrase his *carmina figurata* in a separate book of prose.⁷³

While exceptional in the variety of its multiple graphic forms, the complexity of its number symbolism, and the rich palette of its poetic references and evocations, his work is nonetheless quite representative of its age and of contemporary Carolingian religious culture. First of all, throughout this poetic work, the sign of the cross is described not only as a salvific and Christological symbol, but also—through its fourfold structure—as the blueprint of, and graphic key to, the organization of the world (*mundus*). The latter point highlights that the influence of the sign of the cross on the graphic design of contemporary diagrams was not accidental, but reflected the worldview shared by Carolingian aulic, monastic, and cathedral culture.

Secondly, only one poem (Poem 22) in Hrabanus' work is dedicated to the chi-rho built of twenty-three Greek letters encoding Christ's name and divine epithets, such as *ΙΗΣΥΣ* (Jesus), *ΘΕΟΣ* (God), *ΣΟΤΗΡ* (Saviour), and *ΑΛΗΘΙΑ* (truth)—thus capturing the fascination of the contemporary Carolingian literary elite with the cryptic use of Greek letters. In unison with the changing use of the chi-rho in early Carolingian manuscript culture, Hrabanus first mentions its technical use as a scribal attention sign (*chrismon*), and thereafter refers briefly to its meaning as a christogram, namely a monogram (*monogramma*) composed of the first initials of Jesus Christ's Greek appellation.⁷⁴ The bulk of his description is dedicated to the symbolic numerology of the Greek letters employed in this graphic sign, once again confirming that, by the Carolingian age, the authoritative Christian apotropaic sign of late antiquity had lost most of its symbolic power.

Furthermore, the vast majority of the work's twenty-eight main poems are structured by the interplay between poetic lines and the graphic elements, letters, or words—such as *Adam*, *alleluia*, and *crux salus* ('the cross [is] salvation')—creating various cruciform shapes and arrangements. While differing in their building blocks, all these cross symbols are designed equal-armed—thus making it clear that they are intended as symbolic signs, not as images of the Holy Cross or its material emulations. This choice was hardly accidental considering that the so-called *Priesterstein*—a commemorative gravestone commissioned by Hrabanus Maurus for the tomb of Boniface in Mainz Cathedral in the mid-ninth century—displays, by contrast, a processional Latin cross with an invocational phrase inscribed inside its arms: *Crux sancta nos salva* ('Holy Cross, save us!').⁷⁵

Even the first poem with its dominating image of Jesus Christ standing with arms outstretched and a halo with the cross sign behind his head can be viewed as a symbolic reference to the Cross, in the same manner as the early patristic authors

⁷³ Hrabanus Maurus, *Liber de laudibus sanctae cruces*, comm. Holter; Rabanus Maurus, *In honorem sanctae crucis*, ed. Perrin; Perrin, *L'iconographie*. For a detailed analysis of this work, modern historiography, and all references on this *poema figurata*, see Ernst, *Carmen figuratum*, pp. 222–304; Ferrari, 'Hrabanica'; Ferrari, *Il Liber*; and Chazelle, *The Crucified God*, pp. 99–118.

⁷⁴ Rabanus Maurus, *In honorem sanctae crucis*, C22, ed. Perrin, pp. 173–7.

⁷⁵ Schultze-Dörrlamm, 'Das steinerne Monument'.

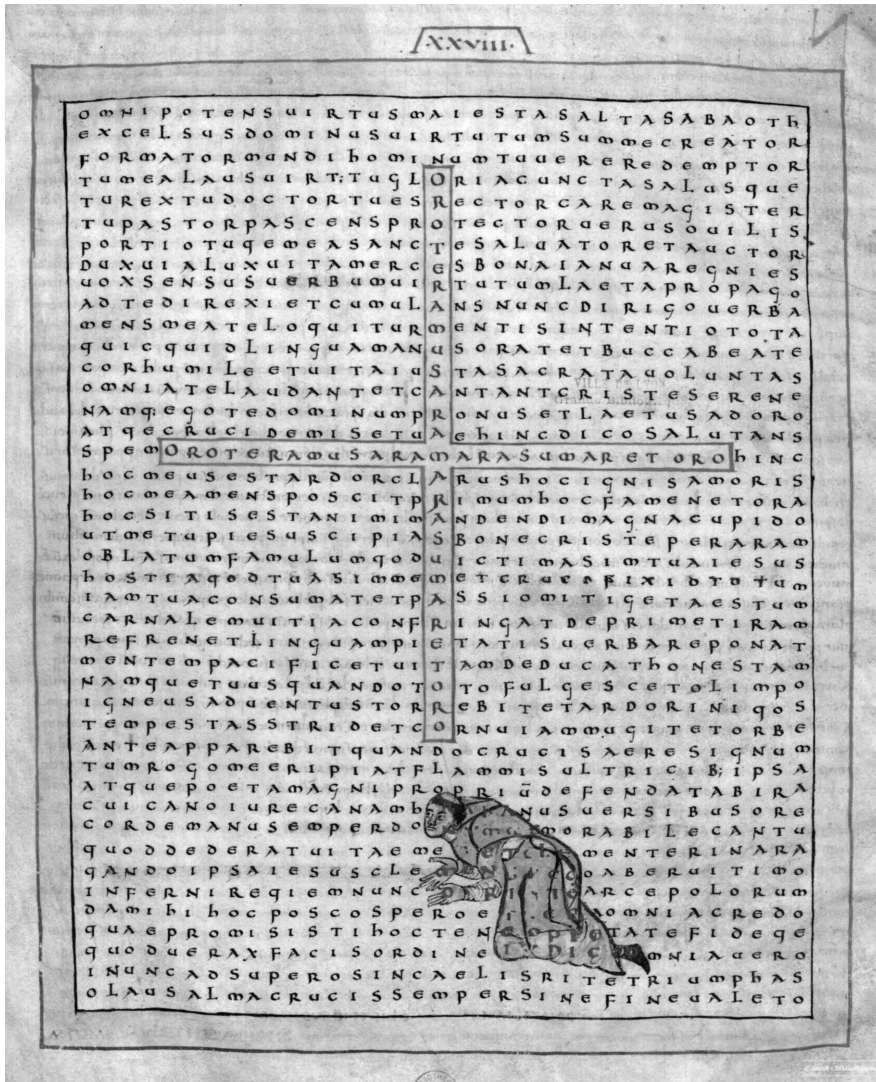


Fig. 9.12. Poem 28 of *In honorem sanctae crucis* in Lyons, BM, Ms. 597, fol. 24v. © IRHT.

interpreted the similarly postured Moses in Exodus 17.8–16. Only three other poems (Poems 4, 15, and 28) are inhabited by figural images, but the latter always function as auxiliary visual elements to the poems' central crosses.⁷⁶ This point is made plainly obvious in the final poem where the central cross is four times as large as the image of the kneeling Hrabanus beneath it (Fig. 9.12). Elsewhere in his oeuvre, Hrabanus repeated the ideas expressed by Theodulf in his *Libri Carolini*

⁷⁶ Ernst, *Carmen figuratum*, pp. 277–89.

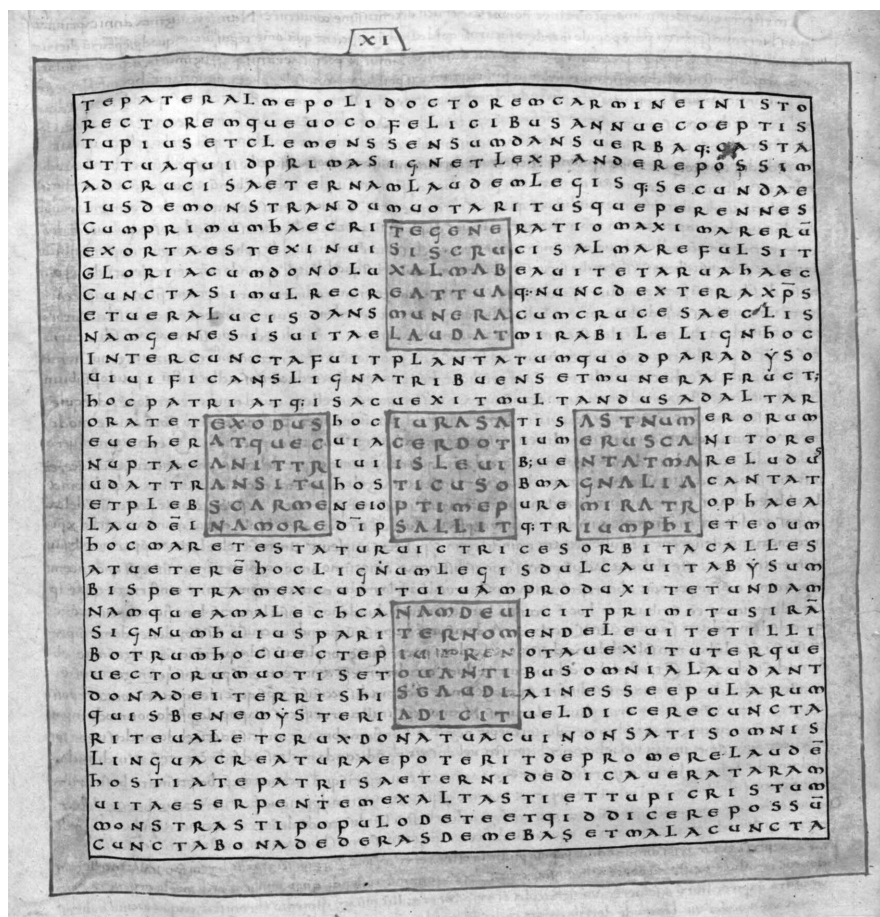


Fig. 9.13. Poem 11 of *In honorem sanctae crucis* in Lyons, BM, Ms. 597, fol. 7v. © IRHT.

regarding the inferiority and deceptiveness of images in the true representation of the world. In contrast to figural images, Hrabanus saw his graphic devices (*figurae*) in the vein of Neoplatonists and Pseudo-Dionysius, as visual keys or aids for the proper understanding of transcendent reality obscured behind the forms and colours of the transitory, earthly world⁷⁷—visual keys that required contemplation and memorization. He makes the latter point clear at the beginning of his prose exposition to Poem 11 structured by the sign of the cross made of five squares, symbolizing the five books of Moses (Fig. 9.13): ‘Quisquis legis primae plenam desiderat habere notitiam, necesse est ut huius figurae per omnia memor sit et eius factum mente saepius revolvat’ (‘Whoever strives to acquire the full understanding of the first Law, s/he should have a recollection of this graphic device in everything

⁷⁷ For more details and references, see Chazelle, *The Crucified God*, p. 112.

and should repeat its form in mind more often').⁷⁸ The laws that the Lord gave to Moses thus receives a firm anchoring within the cruciform cognitive paradigm.

Last but not least, Hrabanus' *carmina figurata* was written in honour of both the sign of the cross and of Christ, whom the author directly addressed on several occasions throughout his text. This feature makes many passages of this poetic work reminiscent of invocations and liturgical prayers and hymns directed to the divine Lord. This similarity is especially pronounced in the final poem, which has the quality of a personal prayer of Hrabanus to Christ and displays the kneeling author in front of Christ's visual proxy and the sacred mediator, the sign of the cross (Fig. 9.12).⁷⁹ The distich framed by Hrabanus' figural image confirms this visual perception: 'Hrabanus memet clemens rogo, Christe, tuere, // o pie iudicio' ('O merciful and holy Christ, I, Hrabanus, beg you to keep me safe in the Last Judgement'). The horizontal and vertical lines of the cross meanwhile encode a poetic palindrome. Its wording firmly sets Hrabanus' prayer to the Lord within a liturgical setting: 'Oro te Ramus aram, ara sumar et oro' (I, Ramus, pray to you, sacrificial device, and I pray that I may be taken up at the altar).⁸⁰ This final cross-shaped monostich thus functions as a monogrammatic invocation, conceptually not so different from other cruciform invocational devices produced in the Frankish world in the late eighth and ninth centuries. Despite noticeable differences, they all point to the conclusion that the sign of the cross had become the ultimate organizing principle of Carolingian graphicacy, a visual form functioning as a mediator of transcendent authority and allowing the contemplative mind to grasp the invisible beauty of the sacred truth. In this sense, Hrabanus' *In honorem sanctae crucis* is as representative of Carolingian visual culture as the cruciform invocation in the Bible of San Paolo fuori le mura, or the monogrammatic liturgical hymn to St Michael written later in the ninth century.

⁷⁸ Rabanus Maurus, *In honorem sanctae crucis*, C11, lines 1–3, ed. Perrin, p. 97.

⁷⁹ Rabanus Maurus, *In honorem sanctae crucis*, B–C28, ed. Perrin, pp. 216–21.

⁸⁰ On the immanent connection between the altar (*ara*) and the Lord's Cross or the sacrificial cross (*ara crucis*), see Kitzinger, *Cross*, pp. 62 and 129–30.

Conclusion

The cultural history of the graphic signs of authority presented in this book encapsulated the socio-political and religious transformation of the late antique Mediterranean world and highlighted the parting cultural paths of early Byzantium and Western Europe from the seventh century onwards. This history can be summed up as follows.

The earliest graphic references to the Crucifixion and the name of Jesus Christ, namely the staurogram and chi-rho, developed in Early Imperial scribal and epigraphic culture, in which the use of abbreviations and ligatures was the norm. Yet from early on, such graphic signs and their constituent letters acquired various symbolic meanings known to Christian fathers, meanings referring to Christ and divine authority and symbolizing Christian identity. These extralinguistic aspects of christograms became extremely important for their usage in late antiquity. At the same time, many less-educated Christian believers saw christograms primarily as protective seals, as powerful as various occult signs gaining in popularity in the Early Imperial period and frequently appearing in late antiquity, in the so-called ‘Gnostic’ and ‘magical’ texts, amulets, and spells. Traditional distinctions between Christian, ‘Gnostic’, and ‘magical’ graphic signs tend to obscure the fact that the latter were conditioned by the common visual culture of late antiquity. People from different walks of life and persuasions believed in the capacity of such graphic signs to communicate directly with transcendent powers and dark forces. Consequently, the use of such potent signs was unbound by religious affiliation in the cosmopolitan late antique world, and undoubtedly Christian graphic symbols could appear alongside occult characters on Christian amulets and in church mosaics as late as the sixth and seventh centuries.

In the course of the fourth century, christograms also developed an intimate connection with late Roman emperorship. This increasing public profile for early Christian graphic signs was especially apparent in the case of the chi-rho, which became an apotropaic as well as victorious imperial sign from the second half of Constantine I’s reign and was employed on various imperial material media—especially in the western half of the Roman empire—as a visual token of triumphant rulership for subsequent Constantinian emperors and their officials. This imperial connotation also encouraged some representatives of the Roman aristocracy to employ the chi-rho as a visual expression of their Christian devotion. Consequently, this graphic symbol appeared on various artefacts related to contemporary aristocratic culture. From the second half of the fourth century, the tau-rho increasingly began to complement the chi-rho in its symbolic use in late Roman visual culture,

as did the iota-chi in the fifth and in the sixth century especially. The official media of the Theodosian rulers, and empresses in particular, were especially instructive in their presentation of the interplay between the aforementioned chi-rho and tau-rho as well as the sign of the cross in the visual propaganda of Christian emperorship, for which piety began to be viewed as a crucial imperial attribute.

The same material media also show the growing significance of the sign of the cross in the visual representation of Christian emperorship in the fifth century. As early as the second and third centuries, Christians interpreted different forms of this sign—drawn, traced with a hand, or imagined in the outside world—as apotropaic seals and emblematic symbols for their nascent religious community. As to the graphic sign of the Greek cross, its usage became especially popular in the eastern provinces of the Roman empire from the mid-fourth century onwards, inspired by the parallel rise of the cult of the Holy Cross in Jerusalem and its proliferation across the Mediterranean in the second half of that century. From its early beginnings, the cult was associated with the figure of Constantine I's mother, Helena; and Theodosian empresses—namely Eudoxia, Pulcheria, and Eudocia—utilized this connection in their symbolic public representation. By the early fifth century, it was already a Latin cross that featured prominently on material artefacts propagating the authority of these empresses and their male peers—most importantly of Theodosius II—in Constantinople and across the Eastern Roman empire. By the mid-fifth century, the sign of the four-armed cross had become an important visual attribute of imperial authority in both the Eastern and Western Roman empires, and in the course of the sixth and early seventh centuries it became the primary graphic symbol of early Byzantine emperorship—a symbol propagating an imperial claim to authority directly deriving from, and thus sanctioned by, God. The increasing presence of this sign in imperial media was paralleled by its growing public visibility in late antique material culture. This latter development reflected success in the Christianization of the late Roman and post-Roman worlds, but it also bore witness to a growing popular belief in the apotropaic and healing power of the sign of the cross and its ability to access transcendent powers. Such a belief ensured the strong public appeal of that sign among various social groups. In such popular usage, the sign of the cross was often used alongside older apotropaic graphic marks and symbols or conflated with them, as in the case of the ankh sign or the eight-armed occult character, which were refashioned for late antique Christian visual culture in the form of the ankh cross and the eight-armed cross.

The growing public profile of christograms in the third and fourth centuries coincided with the rising popularity of personal monograms, a graphic phenomenon with its origins in classical Greece. Yet in the third and fourth centuries, monograms departed from their earlier usage as producers' marks and acquired new symbolic connotations on media such as Roman catacombs, signet-rings, and luxury objects. A popular contemporary belief in the protective and intercessory power of graphic signs no doubt contributed to the monograms' burgeoning popularity among Christians and members of other religious communities. After all, monograms were not radically different from other graphic signs in their visual structure; they protected the encoded personal names from misuse in various

occult practices and ensured that any message encrypted in a monogrammatic manner could communicate with divine and transcendent agents. Furthermore, from the mid-fourth century onwards, box monograms incorporating all the letters of encoded words entered into elite culture where they developed into calligraphic devices hiding aristocratic names or acclamations, as in the case of the unique dedication monogram in the *Calendar of 354*. These sophisticated devices perfectly fit the worldviews structured by late antique Neoplatonism as well as mystic Christianity, whereby such signs were designed to allow contemplative eyes to comprehend better the hidden truths of the intelligible or divine world and, in some cases, to establish mystical links between the people whose names were encoded in such a manner and divine hierarchies. In their perceived ability to elevate the human mind towards the invisible divine, monograms thus did not differ much from christograms and the sign of the cross.

The enhanced aesthetic qualities of calligraphic monograms reflected the new function of monograms as graphic means to visualize an elevated status, a role that became especially important in the fifth and sixth centuries. From the mid-fifth century, monograms also began to function as imperial signs of authority, a function that became especially noticeable with imperial monograms on copper-alloy coinage in the second half of the fifth century and imperial monogrammatic stamps on silverware from the late fifth to the mid-seventh centuries. On silverware as well as on weights and bricks, imperial monograms were complemented by the monograms of senior imperial officers or other power brokers responsible for their production. This development exemplified the sixth-century development of personal monograms into a visual attribute of early Byzantine officials and bishops, as did the frequent use of personal monograms on lead seals in the early Byzantine period. Such graphic devices often encoded imperial and ecclesiastical titles, thus underscoring the authoritative nature of these monograms to their viewers, as well as marking the precise positions of their possessors within the imperial hierarchy. In the same period, personal monograms began to express noble identity and social power on luxury objects, dress accessories, and rings, both in early Byzantium and the post-Roman world of the Western Mediterranean. In Byzantium, the introduction of cruciform personal monograms in the sixth century and the virtual disappearance of box monograms in the seventh also mirrored the religious transformation of Byzantine elites, in which an open profession of Christian beliefs symbolized by the cruciform shape of a monogram became an expected attribute of an elevated social status.

In the sixth century, the use of monograms also expanded into public spaces, most importantly Christian churches. Within this material setting, monumental monograms were employed as calligraphic devices honouring noble patrons, as well as signs of authority for rulers and ecclesiastical leaders building such churches. Justinian I and his wife Theodora made the latter practice especially popular, by having their personal monumental monograms carved in grandiose churches built or rebuilt on their orders in Constantinople and its environs, with the Church of Hagia Sophia in the imperial capital setting the most impressive example. This practice was followed by subsequent early Byzantine emperors, albeit on a

much more modest scale. More importantly, ecclesiastical leaders in the Byzantine world and some Italian cities in direct contact with Constantinople emulated this monogrammatic practice on the ecclesiastical edifices that served as the public manifestation of their increased social power in the sixth century. From a more general perspective, the appearance and rapid proliferation of episcopal monograms in public buildings as well as other sixth-century material media mirrored the growing authority that bishops acquired in their cities in the context of disintegrating classical civic institutions. The use of episcopal monograms on other material media such as rings, seals, and luxury items—as well as the placement of urban monograms on coinage issued in episcopal cities in the seventh-century Latin West—testified to the same profound socio-political change.

The late antique use of monograms as visual badges of elevated social status was continued in the Ostrogothic, Lombard, Visigothic, and Merovingian kingdoms in the sixth and seventh centuries. Meanwhile, this practice never established a foothold in the British Isles, which parted from the Roman world before the monogrammatic tradition developed into an important visual attribute of its socio-political habitus. In contrast, the use of personal monograms came to be especially popular in sixth-century Italy and south-eastern Gaul, where it appealed not only to bishops and nobles, but also to kings. This way of visualizing social status and authority became less relevant in the world of the Western Mediterranean by the turn of the eighth century. Many factors contributed to this change, including weakening contacts with the shrinking Byzantine empire and the increasing importance of northbound channels of socio-political and cultural communication. In broader terms, the decreasing significance of the monogrammatic tradition in the early medieval kingdoms in this period was a manifestation of the demise of late antique political culture and its visual pageantry in the Latin West.

The history of invocational cruciform devices from the second half of the sixth century onwards provides additional evidence of the diverging cultural paths of the Greek East and the Latin West in the early Middle Ages. Two such devices—one encoding the divine attributes $\Phi\Omega\Sigma$ – $Z\Omega H$ ('Light–Life') and the other invoking the Mother of God or the Lord—became extremely popular in early Byzantium and appear alongside the sign of the cross in its various material media, especially in the period of iconoclastic controversies. Such cruciform Greek invocations remained little known in Western Europe, where the sign of the cross and christograms remained the main visual forms of expressing Christian piety and addressing God—a cultural trend highlighted by the early history of graphic decorations in early medieval Latin book culture. In the western manuscripts of the sixth and seventh centuries, the signs of the cross and monogrammatic cross developed into an aniconic form of full-page decoration—an artistic form that Insular cross-carpet pages managed to perfect around the turn of the eighth century. Such particular cultural developments reflected both the rising cult of the True Cross in the Latin West as well as a western response to eastern iconomachy.

The appearance of monogrammatic lettering and initials in early medieval Latin manuscript culture was another specifically Western development. The early forms of

this visual phenomenon can be traced to sixth-century manuscripts from northern Italy and south-eastern Gaul, areas over which late antique monogrammatic culture had a particularly strong hold in the Latin West. In the seventh century this form of decorative lettering and initials spread farther west and north, and by the turn of the eighth this new scribal practice was brought to entirely new artistic and cognitive levels in Insular gospel-books, where monogrammatic initials and lettering were invested with transcendent properties similar to those attributed to the invocational cruciform devices of the East. Yet unlike the latter, such monogrammatic letterforms gradually began to be employed within early medieval Latin manuscript culture as a form of visual exegesis and symbolic interpretation, a function that remained important for monogrammatic initials in Carolingian gospel-books, Bibles, and sacramentaries. Thus, new forms of monogrammatic initials were conceived and adopted in Carolingian manuscripts, where they functioned as both the visual attributes of divine authority and authoritative visual verdicts on the nature of Christ and the eucharist—two topics of particular importance in contemporary theological debates.

The elite culture of the Carolingian world also bore witness to a particular monogrammatic revival whereby the art of calligraphic monograms was adapted to new political and cultural settings. The invention of Charlemagne's monogram marked the re-introduction of personal monograms as visual signs of royal authority, and their history in the Carolingian diplomas of the ninth and tenth centuries showed both the earlier introduction of new graphic forms to visualize new symbolic claims and later adherence to more traditional monogrammatic forms to communicate dynastic legitimacy to the diplomas' noble recipients. Charlemagne's monogram, with its central lozenge clearly influenced by contemporary manuscript culture, also highlighted the fact that, despite its late antique and early Byzantine sources of inspiration, the monogrammatic revival in Frankish Gaul was first and foremost a homegrown scribal phenomenon. Unlike in late antiquity, monograms did not appear in the Frankish world on dress accessories, domestic or church utensils, or public monuments, but were drawn in the material media especially appreciated for their symbolic value in social communication, namely diplomas and manuscripts. Consequently, the monograms of bishops, abbots, and erudite scribes embellished manuscript folios to underscore their ecclesiastical authority and intellectual prowess to readers, both clerical and lay. Carolingian scribes also demonstrated their calligraphic proficiency by employing monograms and monogrammatic forms to encode key words, phrases, or concepts in manuscripts, a cultural phenomenon that can be defined as a monogrammatic revival. This unique cultural context led to a special section on monograms added to a textual compilation—later known as *De inventione litterarum*—at one of the East Frankish royal monasteries at the end of the eighth century. This section and its set of monograms exemplified the adaptation of the early Byzantine monogrammatic practice for Carolingian usage at a time when imperial claims began to be voiced at the Carolingian court. At the same time, it was Charlemagne's monogrammatic sign of authority that served as the main blueprint for the text's set of personal

monograms of the Lord, the Virgin Mary, King Solomon, and the apostles—thus highlighting the intrinsic connection between the royal court and a monogrammatic revival in Carolingian manuscript culture.

Due to a much more entrenched monogrammatic tradition in Italy, the application of monograms south of the Alps took more traditional forms in the Carolingian period. Thus, some Roman popes and Italian and North Adriatic bishops renewed the sixth-century use of personal monograms as signs of authority on coins and public monuments, albeit on a much more moderate scale. In contrast to Italy, the Insular world remained virtually unaffected by this monogrammatic revival. Canterbury constituted a notable exception to this Insular cultural trait, since a few material artefacts connected to this archiepiscopal see exhibit familiarity with continental monogrammatic culture—a phenomenon deriving from the see's active contacts with papal Rome.

The dominance of the cruciform shape as a blueprint for various monogrammatic forms became a salient characteristic of the Carolingian monogrammatic revival. The same feature can be observed in the appropriation of the late antique tradition of monogrammatic invocations in Carolingian manuscript culture. The newly invented forms of cruciform invocations underscored the significance of liturgical settings for the development of Carolingian graphicacy, which reflected the unique position of the clergy in shaping Carolingian culture as we know it now. More importantly, these new forms once again emphasize the paramount importance of the sign of the cross within that world. This phenomenon explains the ubiquitous presence of cross signs in contemporary Western European manuscript and material culture, accompanied by the decreasing symbolic use of late antique christograms. In the function of graphic references to Christ, the latter signs were increasingly replaced with crosses with suspended alpha and omega—the visual reminders of Christ's divine nature—and, occasionally, with new cruciform monograms of Jesus Christ.

In the Carolingian world, the sign of the cross defined not only graphic signs of transcendent, royal, and spiritual authority, but also various forms of graphic visualization, such as scholarly diagrams, T-O maps, and *carmina figurata*. The hallmark of early medieval visual poetry, *In honorem sanctae crucis* by the ecclesiastical intellectual Hrabanus Maurus, illustrated this point beyond any doubt, by designing a compelling argument for the unique role of the sign of the cross as a visual template revealing to a contemplative mind Christ's manifestations in biblical history, the basic organizational principles of the earthly world, and the inexpressible beauty of transcendent reality. This complicated visual exegesis on the sign of the cross was of course restricted to a very limited circle of intellectuals and literates, and it was disseminated through high-status social networks of symbolic exchange linking royal Carolingian monasteries with royal courts and episcopal headquarters. Yet the cross was a unique sign in that it equally appealed to people of higher and lower status across the Carolingian world, wherein it could function as a symbol of religious identity, as a visual promise of future salvation, and as a protective graphic device against multiple natural, social, and spiritual threats. Due to this appeal across the whole range of Carolingian social strata, the sign of the

cross also featured prominently on mass-produced objects such as royal coins and various dress accessories.

The changing destinies of the graphic signs of authority in the first millennium AD thus epitomized the concurrent transformation of political culture in the Mediterranean and Western Europe. The urban settings of political life, the wide-ranging reach of imperial institutions, and cosmopolitan aristocratic networks of symbolic interaction facilitated the public display of graphic signs of authority on various material media across the late antique world. In contrast, royal courts and palaces as well as episcopal headquarters and royal monasteries defined the new socio-political settings established in Western Europe by the Carolingian period. On the one hand, these altered contours of political culture made the sign of the cross the primary visual symbol of authority across diverse early medieval media. On the other hand, it is hardly surprising that, in a political culture where monastic 'textual communities' were so influential in defining its framework and rules, it was the book that became the symbolic arena for other—older and newly invented—signs of authority.

Finally, this study provides a more nuanced context for the distinction between imperial or royal power (*potestas*) and ecclesiastical authority (*auctoritas*) that ecclesiastical authors voiced from the end of the fifth century onwards.¹ They insisted on this distinction because, in late antiquity and the early Middle Ages, authority came to be seen increasingly as deriving from the transcendent sphere and invested in the world via different channels. Within public consciousness and beliefs, visual signs were credited with an important role in this transmission. From late antiquity onwards, letter characters could be seen as connected to cosmic elements. In a similar vein, invincible occult characters were believed to be linked directly to powerful cosmic forces. Yet early Christian leaders repeatedly rejected the transcendent efficacy of these deviant graphic signs, and promoted instead the graphic signs encapsulating Christian authority, such as the staurogram, the chi-rho, and the sign of the cross. In the same period, personal, acclamatory, and invocate monograms proliferated in this world of competing visual claims for transcendent authority. They were reminiscent of the visual forms of 'magical' characters, but unlike the latter, they were not tainted by any affiliation with occult practices. Furthermore, from the sixth century onwards, monograms assumed the graphic structure of the sign of the cross and were thus included within the established corpus of Christian graphic signs of authority, signs that Christian rulers, magnates, and bishops employed to visualize symbolically their positions in the early medieval hierarchy of authorities and to mark their transcendent sources. Yet as late as the ninth century, deviant occult characters were still credited with transcendent authority in popular beliefs not only in the Near East, but also in the Carolingian world. Until now, no early medieval Latin textual amulet with occult characters has been known to modern scholarship, which led to the assumption that they fell into oblivion in the early medieval Christian West and were reintroduced in

¹ See e.g. Robinson, 'Church', pp. 288–9.

Western Europe in the late eleventh and twelfth centuries from Byzantine and Islamic sources.²

Yet the existence of one hitherto unknown Carolingian textual amulet questions the validity of this assumption. This text has been preserved in a ninth-century manuscript produced in Verona or its environs. The manuscript contains the texts of the Lombard laws and Italian capitularies of Lothar I issued in 825 and 832.³ A Latin textual amulet appears on the last blank page of that manuscript, written in the same script as preceding folios, which makes its dating to the middle or the second half of the ninth century very likely. The text demands that all evil forces (*omnia mala malorum*) do not harm the amulet's wearer by invoking the name of God as well as the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. It also invokes invincible characters (*adamantina nota*) and enforces the latter invocation by two lines of the Coptic (or Greek) abecedary and a line of eight 'occult' characters with *signes pommetés* typical of those employed in Coptic 'magical' practices. The letters are also spelled in Coptic with Latin letters, and those spellings indicate the Bohairic dialect of Coptic, used in lower Egypt and Alexandria, as the original language from which this Latin amulet was translated.

This unique text exemplifies the multifaceted contacts of the early medieval Latin West with Coptic Egypt, contacts hinted at by other examples of Coptic influence in Western Europe in those centuries. Yet what is even more significant for this study is that, despite the dominance of the sign of the cross in the communication of authority in the ninth-century Latin West, less conventional visual tools for accessing transcendent powers originating from the late antique graphic culture of the Eastern Mediterranean world could still be copied in a manuscript comprising of authoritative texts of royal laws. At the same time, this textual amulet clearly raised concerns for some readers and was partly erased at a later point, which underscores how slim the chances were for texts like these to survive in, and beyond, the early Middle Ages. The cultural biography of this textual amulet thus provides an important caveat to the image of homogeneous Christian society propagated by the normative and religious texts of the contemporary Latin West. Despite the repeated rebukes of late antique and early medieval ecclesiastical leaders, older means of reaching out to transcendent powers—including occult graphic signs—still appealed to some lay people in their never-ending quest for supernatural protection and support, a quest that ninth-century Christian media channelled through the sign of the cross and other derivative cruciform symbols.

² Gordon, 'Characteres', pp. 290–2.

³ Vatican City, BAV, Vat. lat. 5359; Mordek, *Bibliotheca*, pp. 881–3. I intend to discuss this text in more detail elsewhere.

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